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LIFE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

COMPILED FROM VARIOUS AUTHENTIC
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ADVAITA ASHRAMA
4, Wellington Lane, Calcutta 13

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The aim of the book is to give to the public in English a short but comprehensive chronological account of the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Great as are the difficulties of faithfully delineating the life-history of any famous personage, they are almost insurmountable when the subject of the biography happens to be such a striking figure as Sri Ramakrishna. For it is a noteworthy fact that no man has been the subject of so many conflicting estimates as the Prophet of Dakshineswar. His personality was a combination of so many apparently contradictory elements that it is baffling to the superficial observer; that is the reason that he has been so variously described as a maniac, a good soul, a devotee, a saint, a man of the highest realisation, and an Incarnation of the Most High. It is impossible to give any presentation of his life that will be universally satisfying; yet no one by words and actions satisfied so many as he. We are so accustomed to gauging everything by our pet standards that anything that does not measure up to them is summarily disposed of as fantastic or impossible. A biographer of Sri Ramakrishna, therefore, must content himself with adhering to the truth, and with the presentation of the actual facts, leaving it to the reader to form his own opinion of the Master.

This book closely follows the chronology and treatment of the great Bengali work in five volumes, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* ("Discourses on the Life of Sri Ramakrishna"), by Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of the Master, who is the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. We have purposely omitted some of the masterly expositions of abstruse points relating to the Master's life, as being too philosophical for the ordinary reader. Additional facts have been collected from the following Bengali sources: *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* by the late Ramchandra Datta, and the beautiful Life in verse by the late Akshay Kumar Sen, both disciples of the Master; *Life of Sri Ramakrishna,* compiled from authentic records by the late Priyanath Sinha, *alias* Gurudas Varman, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, with the assistance of the senior Swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission; and the epoch-making work of Babu Mahendra Nath Gupta, better known as M.,—the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* in four volumes, from which some valuable conversations have been taken in their entirety. The materials for the life-sketches of four of the living monastic disciples of the Master have been obtained at first-hand. One or two other sources are mentioned in their respective places. To all these authors we express our deep indebtedness. Thus the present work combines the essential facts of all the authoritative books on the subject with important additions. Where our authorities have differed we have accepted the version most worthy of credence.

A word of explanation is necessary with regard to the free introduction of the "supernatural" element in the book. Our main reason is that we could not help it, for the supernatural is the domain of religion. What the microscope or the telescope does for the scientist, a pure and highly concentrated mind does for the Yogi. Both reveal the wonders of invisible worlds non-existent to the uninitiated—the man in the street. Everyone of the so-called supernatural visions recorded in the book is a fact, and as such demands recognition. Science, specially psychology, is as yet in its infancy, and it will be hampered in its progress if facts are withheld, simply because in its gropings it is not able to account for them. Instead of shutting his eyes to them, the seeker after truth will do well to work upon these data for new hypotheses of spiritual phenomena. We expect our readers to keep an open mind, and if any portions of the book are not to their liking, to pass them by, and confine their attention to parts which appeal to them, of which there should be no dearth in this Life.

We make no apology for inserting some rather lengthy conversations (abridged in places), for they will serve to give the reader a glimpse of the Master's wealth of thought and expression, although much of the charm of the original has of necessity been lost in the translation. For a wider knowledge of them we refer the reader to any of the collections of his teachings.

The accounts of the association of the different devotees with the Master will, we hope, be found interesting. But the amount of space given to any individual should not be taken as an index to his relative importance, for we were limited by our material, and were unable to maintain the right proportions.

Mahatma Gandhi has kindly written a Foreword in appreciation of the Master, which, we dare say, will be read with interest. We have every reason to hope that the book in its present form will fill a long-felt want, and help to establish a feeling of amity among the jarring creeds and clashing interests of the modern world.

PUBLISHER

ADVAITA ASHRAMA
MAYAVATI, HIMALAYAS
December 20, 1924

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In this edition the book has been thoroughly revised. One or two inaccuracies which slipped our notice in the first edition have also been corrected. It is hoped that the book will be more acceptable to the public in its present form.

MAYAVATI
December 15, 1928

PUBLISHER

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FOREWORD

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They, therefore, leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna's life was an object-lesson in Ahimsâ.[1] His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all who read the following pages.

SABARMATI,
Margsheersh, Krishna 1,
Vikram Sambat 1981[2]

M. K. GANDHI

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[1] Non-injury.

[2] 12th November, 1924.

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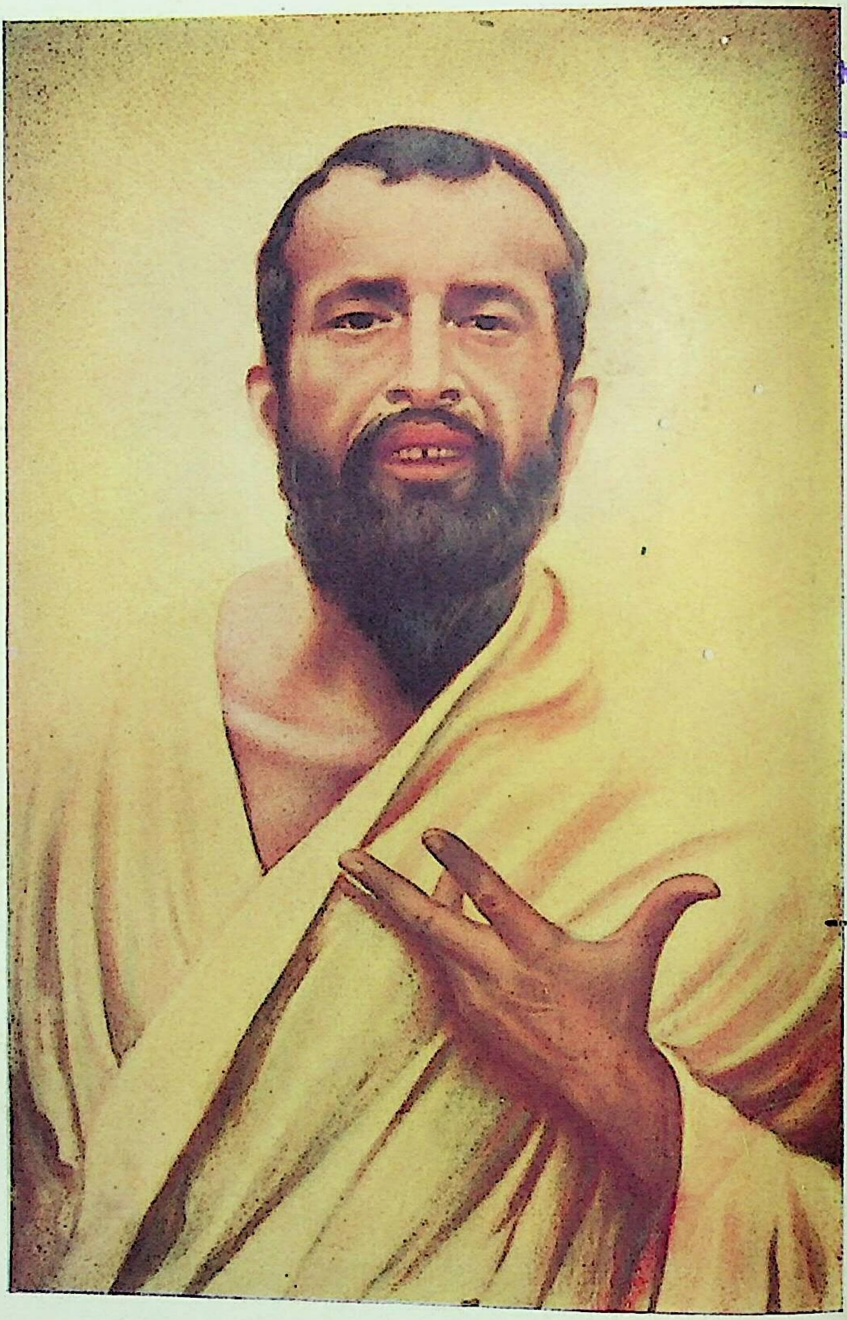

Sri Ramakrishna

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ANCESTRY

In the middle of the eighteenth century there lived in the village of Dereypore, District of Hooghly, Bengal, a Brahmin family, of which Mânikrâm Chattopâdhyâya (familiarly known as Chatterjee) was the head. The Chatterjees were God-fearing people and observed all the Hindu religious rites with the utmost exactitude and devotion. They had lived there for several generations and were respected by the villagers for their honesty, piety and straightforwardness. Sri Râmachandra was the tutelary deity[1] of the family as indicated by the use of "Râma" in naming most of its members. The Chatterjee family lived the typical Brahmin life of olden times, never deviating from the dictates of its conscience and always ready to lend a hand of succour to the needy and distressed of the village in times of calamity. Manikram was fairly affluent, with nearly fifty acres of land at his disposal, the produce of which, together with some outside income, was sufficient to maintain his family, and enabled him to help his poorer neighbours. In course of time, probably in the year 1775, he was blessed with a son whom he called Khudirâm. He it was who later became the father of the remarkable being who is the subject of this chronicle. Two other sons and a daughter were born to him, all of whom were reared according to the family traditions, the sons being educated in the village Pâthshâlâ. After the death of

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[1] Among the Brahmins some aspect or aspects of God are chosen for household worship. The image is generally installed in a room set apart, and daily worship is performed at stated times. In families of other castes the services are usually conducted by the officiating priests.

Manikram the care of the family fell upon the shoulders of young Khudiram.

His qualifications eminently fitted him for this task. Of a kindly nature, with a strong sense of justice, unswerving honesty, even to a point detrimental to his own interest, and intensely devotional, he proved himself equal to the trust reposed in him, not only by his father, but by the Divine Mother, who was soon to give one of Her elect into his care.

He was more than blessed in his life partner, Srimati Chandramani, or Chandrâ, as she was called by the family. In addition to her faith in her husband and all his judgements, no matter what reaction they might have on her own life, she had a character of great simplicity and sweetness, intense faith in and love for God and humanity. So universal was the latter that she was called the Mother of her little community. No one was ever turned away disappointed from her door; the women of the village came to her in their trials and perplexities, knowing they would receive unselfish aid and advice.

Such were the unusual characteristics of the two who were chosen to be the custodians and guides of the early years of one of the greatest sages whose presence ever blessed this earth.

Nine years after the birth of his first son Râmkumâr, Khudiram was visited in 1814 by a sudden stroke of misfortune. Râmânanda Rây, the zemindar of the village, was a most tyrannical landlord, and the villagers were all afraid of him. One of them was guilty of some indiscretion, and Ramananda, to show his displeasure, entered suit on false charges and called upon Khudiram to give evidence in his (Ramananda's) favour. Khudiram not only had a horror of courts and avoided them whenever possible, but he knew as well that this was

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a concocted case: if he acceded to the request, he would do violence to his conscience, perhaps for the first time in his life; if he declined, he would incur the anger of Ramananda. After a severe struggle with himself, he decided to refuse to lend his support. Ramananda was very angry at Khudiram's audacity and decided to teach him a lesson. So he brought false charges against him too, and Khudiram lost his ancestral property, including the huts which had so long sheltered him and his family.

Overwhelming as was this misfortune, he did not lose faith in the Lord Ramachandra, but bowed his head before His inscrutable dispensation. There was nothing for him to do but to leave Dereypore, and as his two brothers took refuge with their respective fathers-in-law, he felt free to accept the invitation of his friend Sukhlâl Goswâmi of Kâmârpukur to make his new home there. And of the once prosperous and prominent Chatterjee family of Dereypore there remained, after his departure, only the Shiva temple with its large tank and the affection and gratitude of the villagers.

The village of Kamarpukur is situated in the north-western promontory of the Hooghly District, adjacent to Bankura and Midnapore. The villages of Bengal fifty years ago presented quite a different aspect from that of today. Instead of desolate villages with inhabitants worn out by disease and starvation, as may be seen since the invasion of malaria in 1867, healthy men and women passed their days in joyous affluence. Kamarpukur was no exception to the rule. The village landlords, descendants of a line of spiritual preceptors to the Mahârâjâs of Burdwan, lived in that village, contributing, to a great extent, to its prosperity. Besides, it was situated on the road to the holy place of Puri or Jagannâth. The villagers were mostly agriculturists and craftsmen. The village was famous for certain sweets and ebony pipes used in hubble-bubbles. There was also a thriving handloom industry, the products of which were sold even in the markets of Calcutta. Various religious festivals throughout the year added to the serene and innocent merriment of the village-folk. Sri Dharma,[1] the presiding deity of the village, was worshipped, specially during the Car Festival,[2] with great fervour. Three or four large tanks, Hâldârpukur being the most noted, supplied the village with pure water. The flourishing condition of Kamarpukur is still evidenced by the débris of its old buildings and the ruins of great walls and temples. There still survives a large mango grove dedicated to public use by Mânik Chandra Bannerjee. Manik was the zemindar of a neighbouring village and, because of his extensive charities, was lovingly called "Manik Râjâ" by the villagers.

At this time, Sukhlal Goswami, a kind-hearted and pious man, was the zemindar of Kamarpukur. The ruins of his brick-built residence and his tomb[3] are still to be seen. He died about the year 1824. His son, owing to adverse circumstances, had to sell the ancestral zemindary to the Lâhâ family of the village, to whom it still belongs. It was at the invitation of this Sukhlal that Khudiram moved to Kamarpukur. Sukhlal gave him a portion of his own house, consisting of a few huts, and settled on him nearly half an acre of very fertile land known as the "Lakshmi Jalâ" or "Fortune's Meadow", for maintenance.

Khudiram entered his new house with his wife, his ten-year old son and a four-year old daughter, in his thirty-ninth year. The unjust eviction from his ancestral home and the subsequent welcome and shelter received at Kamarpukur left a profound and indelible impression on his mind. He was utterly disgusted with the world—its hypocrisy, malice, and greed. His love and devotion to God increased a thousandfold, and he learned to lean upon Him more and more. The unexpected way in which he found shelter at a time when he was void of hope and nothing but ruin stared him in the face, filled his heart with calm resignation to the Divine will and a total indifference to all mundane things. He began to devote much of his time to prayer, meditation, and the worship of Sri Ramachandra. Sometimes whole days were passed in this way, for the fertile land of "Lakshmi Jala" did not make much demand on his time or energy. When the field was ready, Khudiram would transplant a few seedlings, with the words, "Glory unto Raghuvir", leaving the rest to the labourers. The crops never failed him; there was always enough, even in times of drought or flood, to supply not only the simple needs of the family, but to help beggars and strangers as well.

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[1] Probably a remnant of degraded Buddhism.

[2] The festival in which the Car of Jagannath is drawn with proper ceremonies through the streets of the city or village.

[3] The Goswamis are interred, according to the prevalent Vaishnava custom.

At this time Khudiram came strangely into possession of the emblem of his tutelary deity Raghuvir. One day, while returning home from a neighbouring village where he had gone on business, he felt tired and sat down under a tree by the side of a paddy field, fell asleep, and dreamed a wonderful dream. His beloved Ishta,[1] Sri Ramachandra, in complexion like a young blade of grass, appeared as a boy and said, "Unnoticed and uncared for, I have been starving here for many days. Take me to your home. I am eager to accept your offerings." Beside himself with joy, Khudiram replied, "My Lord, I am devoid of devotion and too poor to think of installing Thee in my hut. If I fail to show Thee proper respect, I shall suffer the agony of hell." The boy Ramachandra reassured him and said, "Do not be afraid. I shall be satisfied with your service in spite of its defects." Khudiram wept at this unsolicited mercy of the Lord and awoke from his sleep. As he looked about, he saw the place pointed out in his dream. With trembling limbs he slowly moved to the spot and to his amazement and joy found a Shâlagrâma or round stone emblem of Vishnu, sheltered under the hood of a venomous snake. He stretched forth his hands to take it, and the snake disappeared. Calling aloud the name of Raghuvir, he clasped it to his breast. Examination showed the emblem to be of the type called Raghuvir. He took it home and regarded it as his own Ishta.

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[1] The aspect of the Lord chosen by an individual as his Ideal.

Khudiram soon attracted the notice and gained the respect of his neighbours at Kamarpukur for his intense devotion and unsullied purity. They sought his blessings, believing in their potency, and none would touch the water of the Haldarpukur when he was bathing there.[1] At this time he made an appreciable advance in spirituality. Keeping his mind on a plane of consciousness far above the world of sense pleasures, he began to have visions. Sometimes, while gathering flowers for his daily worship, he saw the goddess Shitalâ going before him in the form of an eight-year old girl, with a radiant smile and bedecked with various precious ornaments, as she helped him to pluck the flowers by bending the branches. At other times as he sat for meditation, tears of love trickled down his cheeks and his mind soared far away into higher regions where he found himself in close communion with his beloved Deity. Then, and when he uttered the Gâyatri Mantra,[1] his face and chest became radiant.

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[1] As a mark of respect.

The impression created by Chandra Devi in the village was equally great. Her kindness soon attracted attention. Beggars found that as long as there was a morsel of food in the house, she would share it. She was indulgent to the demands and importunities of boys and girls, and the village women came to her for help to solve their difficulties. Thus though the huts of Khudiram never smiled in affluence, they were a source of solace to many.

Sri Ramakrishna, later in life, referring to his parents, said to his disciples and devotees, "My mother was the very embodiment of rectitude and sincerity. She did not know much about the ways of the world and, being innocent of the art of concealment, would say what was in her mind. People loved her greatly for her open-heartedness. My father never accepted gifts from the Shudras.[2] He spent much of his time in worship, meditation and the telling of beads. Every day, while engaged in prayer as he invoked the goddess Gayatri his chest swelled and became radiant with a divine glow and tears rolled down his cheeks. Again in hours of leisure, when he was not engaged in worship, he would make garlands for Raghuvir. He left his ancestral home to avoid giving false evidence. The villagers respected him as a sage."

After six years' residence in Kamarpukur, Khudiram married his son and daughter. Ramkumar attained proficiency in the Hindu code in the Tol[3] of an adjacent village, and soon was able to relieve, to a certain extent, his father's family burden. The Chatterjees had become comparatively prosperous. Ramkumar added to the income by giving opinions on disputed points of religious ceremonials or by assisting in the performance of specific rites. The story that Ramkumar had acquired supernatural powers still lives in the village. People looked upon his prophecies as infallible and related that after his initiation to the worship of the Shakti,[1] the Goddess bestowed on him miraculous powers in astrology, and that thenceforward he could tell whether a patient would live or die. Shivarâm Chatterjee, Ramkumar's nephew, used to tell a story of his uncle's prophetic power. Ramkumar was in Calcutta on business and went to the Ganges to bathe. A rich man with his family was there also for the same purpose. In pursuance of the custom obtaining in some rich families for the strict maintenance of the purdah system, the wife was taken to the water of the Ganges in a palanquin. From that she was taking her bath. Ramkumar was standing near by and accidentally caught a glimpse of her beautiful face. With a deep sigh he remarked that the body which was being so scrupulously kept from public gaze would be consigned in the presence of all, the next morning, to this very Ganges as a lifeless corpse. The husband was greatly astonished, for his wife was young and strong. He invited Ramkumar to his home with a view to punishing him should the prophecy prove to be false. But to the surprise and grief of all, the woman died.

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[1] A Vedic prayer to the Deity.

[2] The lowest of the four castes, according to the Hindu classification.

[3] A school of the old type where Sanskrit learning in all its branches is taught.

On another occasion, in the case of his own wife, Ramkumar's vision was prophetic. This young woman, who was endowed with many auspicious marks,[1] seemed to bring with her advent prosperity into the Chatterjee family and was beloved by every one. But one day Ramkumar gravely told his relatives that, though everything appeared propitious, yet she would die at the birth of her first child. When she remained childless Ramkumar was relieved, but in the year 1849, at the age of thirty-five, she gave birth to a beautiful boy and expired.

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[1] The Goddess representing the Creative Energy of the universe.

With Ramkumar looking after the family, Khudiram had more time at his disposal and spent almost the whole day in meditation, worship, and religious discourses. He found that the only harbour of refuge in a distracted world was in continuous devotion to God. There arose in him the desire to go on pilgrimage, for did not the scriptures teach that God revealed Himself most in holy places frequented by devotees and sanctified from time immemorial by the presence of sages and anchorites?

It was probably in the year 1824 that Khudiram started on his long pilgrimage to Râmeswaram in South India, a place highly venerated by the Hindus. It is associated with the sacred memory of Sri Ramachandra, who, on his return from Lankâ, worshipped the God Shiva there. Khudiram travelled the whole distance of nearly fifteen hundred miles on foot, visiting various holy places on the way. This pilgrimage lasted about a year. Twelve months later, in 1826, his wife Chandra became the mother of a second son, who was named Râmeshwar.

About eleven years later Khudiram felt a strong inclination to go on another pilgrimage—this time to

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[1] Certain physiognomical marks which have been found by repeated observation to indicate future greatness, secular or spiritual.

Gaya. Though advanced in years, he wished, according to the time-honoured custom of the Hindus, to redeem the souls of his departed ancestors by the reverential offering of Pinda, the oblation of barley balls, at the holy footprint of Lord Vishnu there.[1] In spite of his years, the journey of nearly two hundred miles on foot had no terrors for him. Khudiram started for Gaya early in the year 1835 and arrived there in the month of March.[2]

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[1] Acts of service done in memory of departed relatives. While these are meant to satisfy the departed, the attitude of mind of the one performing such acts is the more important.

[2] Some are of opinion that Khudiram had already visited the holy cities of Vrindaban, Ayodhya, and Banaras, while at Dereypore, and named his first son and daughter—who were born not long after this event—Ramkumar and Kâtyâyani, in memory of this pilgrimage. According to this version, he visited only Gaya this time. But others say that he visited first Banaras and then Gaya. No details of his visit to Banaras are available.

BIRTH

Khudiram stayed about a month at Gaya, performing various ceremonies according to the scriptures. He went to the shrine of Vishnu, or Gadâdhar, as He is called, and offered oblations to his departed forefathers. The joy which he felt on that day can better be imagined than described, for he had discharged one of his obligations as a son according to the scriptures. He felt that the spirits of his ancestors were blessing him. Full of humility and gratitude he thanked God again and again for giving him the opportunity of fulfilling his obligation. That night he had a strange dream. He felt himself transported again to the temple of Gadadhar where in the solemn silence of the sacred precincts, he found his forefathers feasting with gladdened hearts on the oblations. Suddenly a divine effulgence filled the room, and the spirits of the departed fell reverently on their knees before a luminous Person seated on a throne. The effulgent One beckoned to Khudiram, who came forward and, with a heart full of devotion, prostrated himself. Addressing Khudiram in a tone of great sweetness, He said, "I am well pleased at your sincere devotion. I am born again and again to chastise the wicked and protect the virtuous. This time I shall be born in your cottage and accept you as My father." Khudiram was struck dumb with awe; when he regained the power of speech he said, "No, my Lord, I am not fit for this favour. Thou hast already shown me more than I deserve. I am too poor to serve Thee properly." The Lord consoled and reassured him. Khudiram awoke, his heart thrilled with joy. He understood that a divine being would bless his home, but he resolved to say nothing of his experience. He returned home about the end of April.

In the mean time, Chandra Devi was also having strange visions. One night she dreamed that a luminous person exactly resembling her husband was at her side. The vision persisted even after she awoke. She thought that someone must have broken into her room, and that the sound of footsteps had caused the dream. She arose, lit the lamp, but found the door bolted on the inside. She became so nervous that she was unable to sleep the rest of the night. Next morning she called two of her friends, Prasanna, the daughter of Dharmadâs Lâhâ, and Dhani, her blacksmith neighbour, and told them what had happened. They laughed at her, told her not to repeat the absurd story, and assured her that it was nothing but a dream.

Another day when she was standing with Dhani before the Shiva temple adjacent to her house, she saw a flood of celestial light issue from the image of Lord Shiva and dart towards her. She was about to speak of the phenomenon to her friend, when the light entered her body and completely overpowered her, rendering her unconscious. Dhani nursed her back to consciousness and, hearing the whole story, was at first puzzled and then took it as a nervous disease. But Chandra felt as if she were with child.

The first thing that struck Khudiram after his return was the change in his wife. Her natural kindness of heart was increased to such a degree that it overflowed in every direction. More than ever she considered it her duty to help her neighbours in every possible way, supplying their needs from her own stores, even going without food, if necessary. And when she told Khudiram of her experience and that she felt that she was about to become a mother, he remembered his own visions at

Gaya and was able to reassure her by telling her that they were going to be blessed with a divine child and that supernatural happenings were to be looked for in such a case. He advised her not to speak of her visions to any one. Chandra was greatly consoled and passed her days in complete resignation to the will of Raghuvir.

The present living members of the Chatterjee family relate that the prospective mother began to have visions almost daily. Sometimes she felt the presence of celestial beings; at other times she heard voices. One day she awoke from sleep to hear the tinkling of bells from a child's anklets. Sometimes she was found speaking in whispers with invisible beings. She told of her strange experiences to her husband, saying that she had them not during prayer or meditation, but with her eyes wide open.

We make no attempt to explain the strange incidents narrated above. We shall only remind the reader that similar stories are associated with the advent of Prophets and Incarnations all over the world. The incidents here related are not based on mere hearsay, but, as far as possible, have been gathered from authentic sources.

The blessed hour for which Khudiram and Chandra were anxiously waiting at last drew near. On the morning of February 18th, in the year 1836, Chandra told her husband that the time of her delivery was at hand, but the following night was well-nigh passed before, with the help of Dhani, she gave birth to a boy. The lying-in room where the august stranger was born was a small hut containing a husking machine and an oven for boiling paddy. It was the vernal season, and nature had breathed new life into the world after the long winter. Birds with their sweet chirpings and flowers with delicious perfume heralded the advent of the new prophet, who with infinite love in one hand and infinite knowledge in the other came to deliver his message of hope to suffering humanity.

After giving the necessary assistance to the mother, Dhani turned her attention to the babe, which, to her surprise, was not where she had placed it. It had slipped into the adjacent oven, and was lying there half-covered with ashes, without uttering a cry! She picked up the infant and was astonished to find that it was as large as a child six months old. When the friends heard the glad tidings, there was great rejoicing, and blasts of conch-shells announced the blessed event to the outside world. Khudiram, an adept in astrology,[1] found that the infant was born at a most auspicious moment, giving promise of a brilliant future. Celebrated astrologers later corroborated this and prophesied a great and illustrious career for it.

Khudiram was overjoyed that the prospective greatness of his son confirmed his vision at Gaya and explained the experiences of Chandra Devi. He named him Gadâdhar because of his wonderful experience at Gaya.

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[1] From ancient times in India it has been the custom to cast the horoscope of every new-born child. Through it the future could be foretold with tolerable accuracy.

INFANCY

From his very birth Gadadhar had a strange fascination not only for his parents and near relatives, but also for his neighbours who came to the cottage of Khudiram whenever possible.

The pecuniary condition of the family improved appreciably, Ramkumar's fame as an expert in the performance of all religious rites and ceremonies was spreading far and wide, bringing a fair income to the poor family in its hour of need. Besides, as soon as the happy news of the birth of Gadadhar was sent to Râmchând, Khudiram's nephew, he anticipated the needs of the family and presented it with a cow, in addition to his regular help of fifteen rupees a month.

Six months passed, and the time came for the celebration of the ceremony of the first rice-taking. At first Khudiram thought it prudent to perform it in a humble way, in the presence of a few relatives. But under the secret instructions of his friend Dharmadas Laha, the Brahmins of the village requested Khudiram to celebrate it with pomp. Khudiram had not the means to manage the festival on such a big scale, but he had to give way to their importunities. He consulted his friend Dharmadas, who cheerfully bore the greater part of the expenses, and the ceremony was performed in a befitting manner. A large number of beggars were fed, and they all blessed the boy.

Meanwhile, from the birth of the boy, various supernatural[1] phenomena took place which filled Chandra with alarm. Though at times she was sure that a great soul had deigned to be born as her son, yet her mother's heart was troubled by apprehensions of some future trouble to Gadadhar through the evil influence of spirits or ghosts, which was her way of explaining these extraordinary happenings. Sometimes the child seemed too heavy to carry, and she had to call to her husband for help. A moment later Gadadhar would be light as ever. As happenings of this sort became rather frequent, poor Chandra became very uneasy. But Khudiram consoled her by saying that such incidents were not strange in the case of a divine child. Besides, their tutelary deity Raghuvir would always give protection. This, however, did not pacify the mother, and she fervently prayed to the gods for her son's welfare.

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[1] Supernatural—from the standpoint of inexplicableness and ignorance of the laws of the subtle planes.

The years rolled on, and in 1839 a daughter named Sarvamangalâ was added to the family.[1] Gadadhar was

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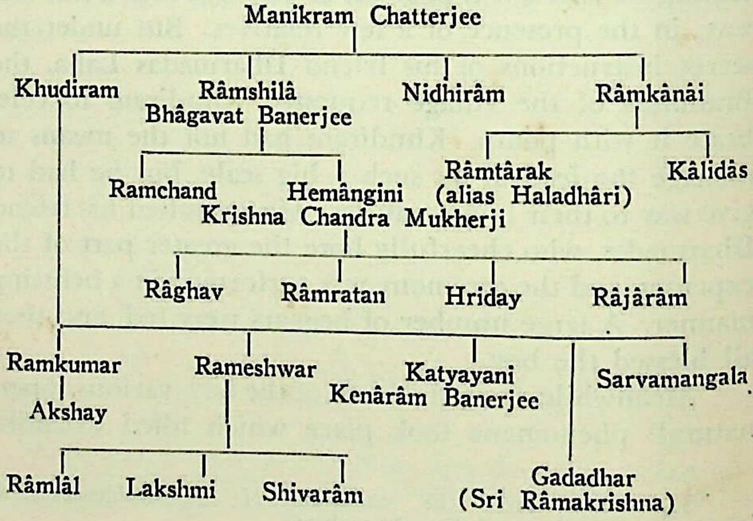
[1] The following genealogical table will help the reader:


Manikram Chatterjee
Khudiram
Râmshilâ
Bhâgavat Banerjee
Nidhirâm
Râmkânâi
Ramchand
Hemângini
Krishna Chandra Mukherji
Râmtârak
(alias Haladhâri)
Kâlidâs
Râghav
Râmratan
Hriday
Râjârâm
Ramkumar
Akshay
Rameshwar
Katyayani
Kenârâm Banerjee
Sarvamangala
Râmlâl
Lakshmi
Shivarâm
Gadadhar
(Sri Râmakrishna)

now five years old. He was a healthy boy, of exquisite grace. Khudiram was greatly surprised at his wonderful intelligence and memory even at this early age. The precocious boy learnt by heart the names of his ancestors, the hymns to various gods and goddesses, and tales from the great national epics. One hearing was enough; even after a great lapse of time he could repeat them. Young as he was, he showed great distaste for certain things, such as the rudiments of mathematics. He was an extremely restless boy; and, thinking that school might help him to control this, Khudiram sent him to the village school, where he was soon loved by both students and teacher. The classes were held in a spacious bungalow belonging to the Laha family, which on festive occasions was used for dramatic performances. There were morning and afternoon sessions.

Khudiram's peculiar experiences before Gadadhar's birth had convinced him of the future greatness of his boy. From the very beginning he viewed him as different; the faults inexcusable in ordinary boys were overlooked in his case, and his spirit of waywardness was condoned. But there was a gulf of difference between the childish pranks of Gadadhar and those of other boys. Generally, when boys are detected in some mischief, they try to excuse themselves and refrain from repetition only through fear of punishment. Gadadhar was different. He freely confessed when caught, but nothing could intimidate him to the point that he would refrain from doing it again, did he so desire. Gentle and affectionate persuasions, however, always had their effects upon him and made him yield, and his sweet nature always prevented him from injuring any one.

At school Gadadhar made fair progress. He was able to read and write, but his aversion to mathematics continued as before. In those days minstrels used to go through the villages reciting mythological stories from the epics and Puranas; and the villagers, without any stage-setting, would enact them. Gadadhar never missed any of these performances and listened with rapt attention, noticing carefully the pose of the actors. Often he repeated such dramas before his friends almost verbatim —such was his wonderful memory. He learnt from the potters the art of moulding images of gods and goddesses and then made excellent ones at home. From the painters he learnt to paint hem. This was his favourite pastime.

Thus instead of turning his attention to the acquirement of that learning for which he was sent to school, so that later he might earn his livelihood, Gadadhar directed all his energies to the study of the lives and characters of spiritual heroes. Constant study of those subjects often made him forgetful of the world and threw him into deep meditations. As he grew older, these turned into frequent trances whenever his religious feelings were aroused. Besides the great epics, he was interested in the folk-lore of his own and surrounding villages. Often he would make copies of some of the interesting incidents from books or manuscripts: some of these may still be seen at the Belur Math.

As he grew older, other traits of character began to manifest themselves. For example, he showed wonderful courage. The places that other people shunned as being haunted, he visited without any fear. Almost all the members of the Chatterjee family were open to psychic influences. This helped them into deep meditations, making them lose their identity completely in the thought of the Chosen Ideal. This often happened to Ramshila, Khudiram's sister, when she meditated on the goddess Shitala. At such times she was looked upon with respect and awe. Once when Ramshila was in such a mood, Gadadhar was standing by. Instead of being afraid at what he saw, he said afterwards with a smile, "It would be great fun if she who possessed my aunt got hold of me!"

But the chief characteristic of the boy, to which we have already referred, was his influence over everyone coming in contact with him. The boys with whom he used to play could not bear to be separated from him, and the villagers who had once seen him came again and again to Khudiram's house with sweets or fruits as an excuse to see him. This unusual power of attraction he retained throughout his life.

Manikram, a great friend of Khudiram, often invited the latter to his house. Once when Gadadhar was six years old, he accompanied his father. Manikram said, "Well, I don't think Gadadhar is an ordinary child. He has unusual marks on his body. His presence really gladdens my heart, and I wish you would often bring him with you." After that, if Khudiram were unable to go to see Manik, the latter would send for Gadadhar. The boy would spend the entire day with him, returning in the evening laden with presents.

We have already referred to the strong influence of religious books on the susceptible mind of Gadadhar. Whenever he read such books to the villagers, he did so with such feeling that for the time being he seemed to lose his own identity, and the audience would be spellbound. His relatives could not understand this and ascribed it to hysteria. Soon it was found that not only books, but beautiful scenery or some touching incident was sufficient to make him lose himself. And the village abounded in such stimuli. Nature's beauties and sublimities could be seen there in their primitive glory. One day an occurrence of this kind caused great anxiety to his parents and relatives. Sri Ramakrishna in later years narrated this incident to his devotees in his usual poetic way. We give here the substance of what he said:

"In that part of the country (meaning Kamarpukur) the boys are given puffed rice for luncheon. This they carry in small wicker baskets, or, if they are too poor, in a corner of their cloth. Then they go out for play on the roads or in the fields. One day, in June or July, when I was six or seven years old, I was walking along a narrow path separating the paddy fields, eating some of the puffed rice which I was carrying in a basket. Looking up at the sky I saw a beautiful sombre thunder-cloud. As it spread rapidly enveloping the whole sky, a flight of snow-white cranes flew overhead in front of it. It presented such a beautiful contrast that my mind wandered to far off regions. Lost to outward sense, I fell down, and the puffed rice was scattered in all directions. Some people found me in that plight and carried me home in their arms. That was the first time I completely lost consciousness in ecstasy."

Though he seemed quite well when he regained consciousness, his parents were greatly frightened. Khudiram thought it wise to take precautions against a recurrence of this episode, lest it should do the boy bodily harm at his tender age. But Gadadhar reassured him by telling him that he had simply lost all outward consciousness as his mind was overpowered by an inexpressible emotion and unspeakable joy. However his parents kept him from school for several days.

BOYHOOD

When Gadadhar was seven years old, the simple, quiet life of the Chatterjee family was suddenly interrupted by a sad event fraught with great consequences to Gadadhar. In the year 1843 Khudiram developed symptoms of indigestion, which soon turned into chronic dysentery. His strong body became emaciated, and in his sixty-eighth year he had not vitality enough to check the growth of the disease. The autumn season arrived. Every year Khudiram's nephew, Ramchand, celebrated with great pomp the Durgâ Pujâ festival at his home at Sâlampore. Khudiram usually attended. This year, apprehensive of the dark shadow looming in the future, he hesitated about going. But on second thoughts, he changed his mind, and set out with his eldest son, Ramkumar. A few days after his arrival at Salampore his illness took a serious turn, and on the fourth day of the celebration he became unconscious. Ramchand was greatly concerned. Realising that Khudiram's last moment had come, he called to him the name of Raghuvir. At the mention of this holy name Khudiram suddenly became conscious and asked to be helped up to a sitting posture on the bed. He then uttered the name of Raghuvir thrice and expired. Ramchand and his family were overpowered with grief at the death of Khudiram. His body was taken to the bank of the adjacent river and the last rites were performed according to the usual custom.

The sad tidings reached Kamarpukur and cast an unspeakable gloom over the Chatterjee family. To a Hindu wife the death of her husband, who is her visible

God on earth, is considered the greatest misfortune. Chandra Devi was now virtually dead to the world. Laying aside all the enjoyments of life—of which indeed she had very few—she concentrated her whole energy on prayer and meditation, and looked eagerly to the day when she would be united with her beloved in the other world.

This event unnerved Ramkumar as well, upon whose shoulders now fell the entire responsibility of the family. He had to look after his widowed mother, educate the younger brothers and manage the domestic affairs in keeping with the traditions of the family. The death of Khudiram brought a great change in the mind of Gadadhar also. Every day he felt the loss of his father more and more. The striking contrast between his father's character and that of other people began to dawn on him. His naturally thoughtful mind became graver, though to the observer he still retained his usual air of youthful merriment. No one observed that the boy began to frequent the mango grove or the cremation ground in the vicinity alone and pass long hours there absorbed in thought, nor that his attention was focussed more than ever on Purânic recitals and the making of clay images of gods and goddesses.

Besides, there was a marked change in Gadadhar's behaviour towards his mother. Finding that she desired great solace from his company, he spent some time every day in helping her in her household work or in the worship of Raghuvir. He also became less exacting in his importunities, knowing she would be grieved if she could not supply his childish demands. He thought it his duty to lessen the burden of his mother's grief and to infuse into her melancholy life whatever joy and consolation he could.

The village of Kamarpukur, as stated before, was situated on the road leading to Puri, and in those days when there were few railroads, this route was much frequented by pilgrims, wandering monks, and others, mostly all on foot. The Laha family built a rest-house for these wayfarers. Gadadhar soon found a new source of pleasure in the company of the Sâdhus; he delighted in their stories of various saints and different places, and prayers and songs. He knew already of their unconventional life, their indifference to bodily pain or pleasure, their devotion and resignation to God, and their contentment with whatever food came to them. The boy was beginning to be conscious of the transitoriness of the world. Contact with the monks strengthened this feeling. He delighted in spending hour after hour with them, listening to their religious discussions, learning songs from them, joining in their prayers, and sometimes even partaking of their meals and assisting them by fetching water or collecting fuel. They took a great fancy to him. Chandra Devi did not object. She rather rejoiced at this association of her son with the Sadhus and thought that their benedictions would be beneficial. But one day she was startled when the boy came to her with his body smeared with ashes. He had torn his cloth into two and wrapped both pieces round his loins like Kaupins.[1] "Look, mother", he said with a smile, "I have become a Sadhu." The mother was anxious, for she had heard of pretended monks who in the guise of ascetics tempted boys and kidnapped them. She asked Gadadhar to shun their company. The boy, failing to convince his mother of the utter baselessness of her apprehensions, at last agreed to obey her and went to the Sadhus to bid them farewell. They were surprised and pained to hear of the mother's fears and went to her house to assure her of the safety of her boy.

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[1] Sadhus' loin-cloth.

Association with these itinerant monks and listening to their readings from the scriptures inclined the naturally emotional mind of the boy more and more to meditation. So we find him in his boyhood, long before he passed through the terrible asceticism in the Kâli temple of Dakshineswar, giving evidence of the transcendental nature of his mind—its difference from the ordinary one. The following incident furnishes an instance of his deep religious bent.

The goddess Vishâlâkshi, the presiding deity of Ânur, a village close to Kamarpukur, was held in great veneration by the people of the neighbouring villages as well, who often went there to redeem their vows on the fulfilment of their particular desires. She was reputed to be a particular patron of the poor and outcast as well as of the cowherd boys. One day a party of women, amongst them Prasanna, the daughter of Dharmadas Laha, who was noted for her piety and great devotion, was on its way to Anur to worship Vishalakshi. Gadadhar insisted on accompanying them. Accordingly, he set out with them. As the party walked along, Gadadhar relieved the tedium of the journey with songs in praise of the goddess. Suddenly, he was overcome with religious emotion—his body became stiff and motionless, tears rolled down his cheeks, and he made no response to the women when they called aloud to him in their fright. Not being familiar with the trance state, they thought he must have had a sunstroke. Some splashed water on his face, others fanned him, but with no results. Finally, Prasanna in desperation called upon the goddess for help. The name of Vishalakshi had been repeated only a few times when the boy showed signs of returning consciousness, and presently he was himself again, with no evidence of any harm having come to him.

Gadadhar was now nine; and it was time to invest him with the holy thread. This is the first memorable occasion in the life of a Brahmin; in fact the scriptures consider him as a Shudra, a man belonging to the lowest caste, until this has been done. Then he becomes a true Brahmin and is permitted to utter the holy Mantras, and to worship the gods and goddesses; he is supposed to enter a new life—a life of purity, sacrifice, truthfulness and great restraint—and is, therefore, called a Dwija or "twice born". Besides observing great restrictions in food and other enjoyments, the scriptures enjoin on him the strictest discipline in all phases of life, and condign is the punishment for any breach. Every Brahmin boy looks forward to this sacred ceremony; Gadadhar was no exception.

A curious incident happened in this connection. After the investiture with the holy thread, it is the general practice with the newly initiated to take his first Bhikshâ or alms from some relative, or person of equal rank. But it so happened that Dhani, the blacksmith woman of the village, had long ago prayed to Gadadhar to allow her the privilege of giving him the first Bhiksha, and the boy, moved by her genuine love, had agreed. Dhani waited with an expectant heart. After the ceremony was over Gadadhar told of his promise to his brother Ramkumar. Objections were raised on the ground that it was contrary to the custom of the family. But Gadadhar insisted on keeping his promise. The family was forced to give way; and so it was from Dhani that Gadadhar took his first alms.

Reading this incident in the light of subsequent events, many ideas arise in the mind. First of all, it shows Gadadhar's great, undeviating love for truth. He had given his promise, and he was ready to keep it at whatever cost. At the same time it does not explain why he gave a promise which might bring social stigma on his family. Could it have been Dhani's sincere devotion that prompted him to do so? May it not be that, even at that tender age, Sri Ramakrishna's every act had its meaning, and that his unerring intuition empowered him to recognise religious sincerity and to prefer it to social regulations, which, necessary as they are under ordinary circumstances, must be set aside, if the spirit of the law, instead of the letter, is to be honoured?

So far, it was only the villagers who knew the great qualities of Gadadhar, although none had any idea of the great part that he was to play later. Shortly after the thread ceremony, an incident occurred bringing him for the first time before them as a teacher. He was then about ten years old. There was a great Shrâddha ceremony in the house of Dharmadas Laha, to which a number of Brahmin scholars were invited. As generally happens on such occasions, the scholars were engaged in an animated debate over some subtle point. The argument lasted for hours. Their excited gestures and loud voices during the wordy warfare attracted a number of spectators, amongst whom was Gadadhar. While the other boys were chatting or imitating the gestures of the Pandits, he was listening with rapt attention. Finally, the boy whispered something to a Brahmin, asking if that might not be the answer. When the others heard it they accepted it at once as the only possible solution. Coming as it did from a boy of scarcely ten, they were amazed at such mental maturity in one so young.

Similar incidents are by no means uncommon in the lives of great ones such as Sri Krishna, Shankara, Sri Chaitanya, Christ, and others, who evidenced extraordinary powers at a very early age. It is said that before he was eight, the great Shankara had mastered the Hindu scriptures; at sixteen he composed the masterpieces on Vedânta which take the man of ordinary intelligence a whole lifetime to read and digest. Sri Chaitanya, too, showed astonishing intelligence and memory when he was quite a boy. And we can cite a parallel instance from the life of Christ, who, in his twelfth year, confounded the learned Rabbis of Jerusalem with his wisdom—fully conscious at the time of what he was doing, as his answers to his parents clearly demonstrate. All this shows that by their very constitution they must have access to hidden reservoirs of knowledge and wisdom, not dreamed of by ordinary men and women. And in judging their actions we must show a spirit of humility and rid our minds of all preconceived ideas.

After his investiture with the sacred thread, Gadadhar was permitted to worship the family god Raghuvir. This filled him with great joy. He was aware of his father's great devotion to Him. So when he sat down to worship Him, he thought of Him not as a stone emblem, but as God incarnate—the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the world. The hours he passed in worship and meditation raised his mind to a very high level, where he often had remarkable visions.

On a Shivarâtri night, arrangements were made for a dramatic performance in the village, at the house of Sitânâth Pyne, the theme chosen being a chapter from the life of Shiva. It is customary on such occasions for the devotees of Shiva to fast the whole day and keep vigil by prayer, worship, and songs in His praise. Four services are held in the four watches of the night. Young Gadadhar also fasted that day and resolved to pass the night at home in worshipping the Lord. The first watch was over, when Gayâvishnu and some other friends came to him and said that his presence was needed at once at the house of Sita Nath Pyne, because the man who was to play the principal part, the role of Shiva, had fallen ill, at the eleventh hour, and they must have a substitute, and Gadadhar had been selected. Gadadhar at first declined, saying he could not leave his worship; but his friends pointed out that there in playing the part he would have to think constantly of the Lord Shiva, and that, that too, was worship. So Gadadhar was prevailed upon to go and was taken to the greenroom. While his friends were dressing him for the role of Shiva—smearing his body with ashes, matting his locks, and hanging Rudrâksha beads and other accessories of the costume on him—his mind soared far from the consciousness of the world. When the time came for him to appear, he went on the stage with slow and measured steps and supported by his friends. His countenance was grave; and as he stood before the spectators he seemed the living impersonation of Shiva. The enthusiasm of the audience was unbounded. In the mean time the boy had completely lost himself in the divine glory of Shiva; his mind in its transcendental flight was transported into a region of calmness and serenity as immutable as the Lord Shiva Himself. The different phases of the great glory of Mahâdeva, the God of gods, were revealed to him. Calm, sweet, self-forgetful, and oblivious of the pains and pleasures of the world, the great God appeared before him as the ideal of serene contemplativeness, immersed in Samâdhi. There the boy stood, lost in the great sublimity of Shiva, dead to the surrounding world. The manager of the performance with one or two elderly men of the village approached him and found that he was unconscious. He would have been taken for dead but for the stream of tears flowing from his eyes and the radiance of his countenance. The effect of this scene upon all pious hearts among the audience was tremendous. Finally his friends became alarmed and tried to restore him to consciousness, but in vain. The performance had to stop. He was taken home in that condition and did not recover outward consciousness till the next morning.

Such trances became rather frequent thereafter. While meditating or listening to a devotional song, his mind would be withdrawn from outside objects and remain long in a state of absorption. When questioned about this, the boy said that meditation on any deity brought the real form before his mind, and the emotions evoked thereby caused him to lose outward consciousness. His mother and relatives were at first much concerned at these trances, but the boy's unimpaired health and bodily vigour gradually set their minds at ease. Though he was often thus overpowered, there was no interference with his daily routine. He took great delight in all the religious ceremonies of the village, deriving equal pleasure from the worship of all forms of deity without distinction. This impartial love enabled him in the long run to realise that the same divinity was behind all images and religions.

Those few fortunate souls of Kamarpukur who were able to discern the greatness of Gadadhar actually worshipped him. One of these was Shrinivâs, a low-caste Hindu whose family lived by making shell bracelets. The Master often spoke highly of this man's great piety and spirituality. He loved Gadadhar and took delight in his company, often holding animated discussions with him on the *Bhâgavata*. One day, as he was making a garland for worship, Gadadhar came. Shrinivas at once brought some sweetmeats from the market and concealing them in his cloth, conducted Gadadhar to a secluded spot under a tree in the maidan. Looking about to be sure that he was not observed, he worshipped Gadadhar, hanging the garland on him and feeding him with the sweets. With eyes bathed in tears and a voice choked with feeling, he said, "I have become old and feel my end approaching. I shall not have the good luck to see the many wonderful things that you will do in the world. I only pray that you will ever look with compassion upon this unworthy servant of yours."

We have spoken of the association of Gadadhar with the other boys of his village. They passed a great portion of the day together in play, often absenting themselves from school. Their favourite retreat was the mango orchard which has been dedicated by Manik Raja to the use of the public. They assembled there under a big tree to partake of the fried rice they brought from home. Gadadhar selected a number of young boys who could sing and formed a sort of dramatic company. The themes of their performances were episodes from the *Râmâyana* or the *Mahâbhârata,* which they heard often at the amateur village plays, which Gadadhar, owing to his retentive memory, could reproduce almost verbatim. He selected the part for every actor, himself taking the part of the hero of course. Gadadhar's favourite themes were the various incidents in the life of Sri Krishna, specially the Vrajalilâ, or the youthful sports of Sri Krishna with the cowherds and milkmaids of Vrindâban. The height of dramatic effect was reached when he sang the pastoral songs depicting the great exploits of Sri Krishna, or the pangs of Sri Râdhâ at her separation from her beloved lover, while the other boys acted as Subal, Shridâm, and other companions of Krishna. Young Gadadhar, with his fair complexion and flowing hair, a garland about his neck and a flute at his lips, would take the part of Sri Krishna; or as Râdhikâ depict grief at separation from Krishna. Gadadhar, overwhelmed with the emotion associated with these themes, would fall into frequent trances. At times the whole mango grove would re-echo with the Sankirtanas which the boys sang in chorus. Soon the teacher learned that the boys absented themselves from school in order to spend their time in song and merry-making. One day he summoned them before him and asked them who was their ringleader. Gadadhar was pointed out, and the teacher asked him to repeat what he did in the mango garden with his friends. Boldly the boy sang a song, which so charmed the teacher that he forgot to punish them. Of these boys, the most intimate friend of Gadadhar was Gayavishnu. Gadadhar never forgot to share the sweets or fruits, presented by the village women, with him.

As he grew older, Gadadhar's distaste for the routine work of the school increased, though he loved to read the epics, Purânas and other sacred books. There he would find a response to the great spiritual fervour in his heart. Sometimes he read aloud the lives of Prahlâda, Dhruva, or other great devotees to the villagers. The more his attention was turned in this direction, the more he neglected his studies. Because of his frequent trances, his eldest brother thought it wise to allow him freedom, so that he might not feel the strain of any sustained work.

Meanwhile the monotony in the life of the Chatterjee family was broken by various incidents, one of which at least greatly influenced the future career of Gadadhar. Rameshwar and Sarvamangala, who were now grown up, were married. The wife of Ramkumar was soon to be a mother, but this instead of causing any joy filled the family with apprehensions of coming danger. Her actions were very strange. She broke the traditional rule of the family of abstaining from food before the worship of Raghuvir; when taken to task by her husband or mother-in-law, she was resentful. In the year 1849 she gave birth to a male child, who was named Akshay, and expired soon after, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Ramkumar. From this time there set in an adverse tide in the pecuniary condition of the family. Rameshwar, though an expert in the Smriti and other subjects, could barely earn a decent living. Ramkumar's income was also unexpectedly diminished, and he was too old to find new ways of increasing it. He had scarcely recovered from the great shock of losing his dear wife, the loving companion of thirty years, when he was called upon to face financial difficulties. Forced into debt which he had no way of paying, he resolved to go elsewhere, to some place where he might turn his qualifications to a better account. Upon the advice of friends he decided to go to Calcutta and open a Tol at Jhâmâpukur, in the central part of the city.

The burden of the family now fell on Rameshwar. Young and inexperienced as he was, he tried to accommodate himself to his new situation. He had to look after an aged mother, a younger brother, and his own wife, as well as the motherless boy of Ramkumar. Gadadhar's aversion for education filled Rameshwar with great concern for his future. But he inherited Khudiram's precious trait of looking to God in everything and resting satisfied with what was ordained by the Divine will. So though at times his spirits drooped, at others he forgot everything in the company of the pilgrims and ascetics in the rest-house of the Laha family. He knew that "God hammered so fiercely at His world, trampled and kneaded it like dough, cast it so often into the blood-bath and the red hell-heat of the furnace," because human nature was "still a hard, crude and vile ore which would not otherwise be smelted and shaped." And somehow he managed to support the family.

The death of Ramkumar's wife threw Chandra Devi into a sorry predicament. When her daughter-in-law was the housewife, Chandra Devi was to a great extent free from the concerns of the family and spent her time mostly in prayer. Now at the age of fifty-eight, she was hurled back into the world. Besides taking care of Akshay, she had to help in the cooking, the worship of Raghuvir, and other domestic affairs. In the grip of old age and infirmity, she must again pick up courage, leave her rosary aside, and give herself to the service of the family.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF YOUTH

These changes in the Chatterjee family left an indelible impression on the emotional mind of Gadadhar. The death of his brother's wife, the unkindness of fortune, the diminishing income—all these strengthened his conviction as to the fleeting nature of worldly enjoyments. Even at that tender age he was disgusted with the world. His dislike for academic education increased. He found that men ran after worldly knowledge because it would help them to earn money or to gain prestige—the transitory nature of which was but too evident to him. He resolved to pass a life of meditation, prayer, and worship; and though he still performed the routine work of the day, the chief item of which was helping his aged mother in her household duties, he spent a great portion of his time in worshipping Raghuvir or in reading passages from the holy books.

We have already said that the neighbouring women were greatly attracted by Gadadhar's amiable character. After the departure of Ramkumar for Calcutta, the boy, owing to the nature of the duties he took upon himself, had to spend much time indoors, which afforded them greater opportunities of enjoying his company. They thronged Chandra's house after the day's work and grouped themselves about the boy, hoping to hear him sing or recite some holy text. So persistent were they that presently those things became part of his daily duty. In those days

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[1] A sect of Vaishnavas.

many Vaishnavas and Bâuls[1] lived at Kamarpukur. Gadadhar learnt their devotional songs by heart and would entertain his mother's visitors by singing them as well as enacting some of the village dramas, he himself taking the different parts. He had a wonderful knack of imitating voices, especially woman's, and was a good mimic as well. When he found his mother or any of her friends in low spirits, he would cheer them up with his impersonations. There could be no trace of melancholy in the presence of this sprightly, ingenuous boy.

The companionship soon deepened into intimacy. The ladies knew of the extraordinary circumstances attending the birth of Gadadhar and were aware of his great spiritual fervour and unflinching devotion. His simplicity, uprightness, piety, and unbounded faith in the gods charmed their heart. Aged women like Prasannamayi regarded him as the boy Gopâla, younger ones thought he was endowed with some of the characteristics of Sri Krishna. His great naturalness and perfect adaptability made them forget his sex, and they had no hesitation in confiding their secrets to him. His nature at this time became amazingly feminine, doubtless due to his study of the folk dramas and lyrics of the Vaishnavas, which deal mostly with the life of Sri Krishna and his relations with the cowherd boys and the milkmaids of Vrindaban.

The pathos underlying the attraction felt by the Gopis for their beloved cowherd Friend, the intensity of that love which, as it were, consumed them bit by bit, the pangs of separation, the supreme felicity at the reunion, and lastly, the great idealism at the back of these episodes made a lasting impression upon the mind of Gadadhar. Often in his yearning for God he would transmute himself, so to speak, into a milkmaid of Vrindaban, forgetting his real self. The pious young women of the village, who were mostly devotees of Vishnu, reminded him of the Gopis of Vrindaban, and, therefore, he sought their company. He knew that the Gopis were able to realise Krishna as their husband and feel the bliss of his eternal reunion, because they were women. He in his eagerness for the same goal would regret that he was born a man and was inclined to think that his masculine form was a great barrier separating him from his Beloved. If he were to be born again, he would like to be a child widow in a pious Brahmin family, who would only think of Krishna as her husband. With barely enough to maintain herself, she would have a milch cow, a spinning wheel and a plot of land about her hut to grow vegetables. An old woman would act as her guardian. She would prepare various sweets from the milk of her cow and preserve them for her Beloved. After finishing the day's work she would sit by the wheel and while spinning, give vent to her feelings in a rapturous song. Then in the mellowed light of the evening Sri Krishna would enter the hut stealthily as the cowhered boy and take those sweets. Thus would his fancy wander.

This ideal of Gadadhar was not literally fulfilled; but he realised Sri Krishna in this very life in the form he wished, as we shall see afterwards. While enacting female parts, he would dress himself accordingly, and his representation was perfect. Often out of fun he would go in the guise of a girl to the Haldarpukur, carrying a water-jug after the fashion of the country women, and though he walked with people who had known him since birth, they scarcely recognised him. Sitanath Pyne, whose house was close to Khudiram's had seven sons, and eight daughters with him at Kamarpukur, even after their marriage. This family lived in terms of great intimacy with Chandra. Gadadhar spent long hours there reciting stories from the Puranas. Many of the village women visiting, with the ladies of the house, had the opportunity of hearing these recitations and of enjoying Gadadhar's boyish pranks.

A neighbour of Sitanath's, named Durgâdâs Pyne, was a strict advocate of the purdah system. He boasted that no masculine outsider had ever penetrated his women's quarters. One day Gadadhar overheard him and told him that by education and devotion to God alone could the chastity of women be preserved, not by confining them within a zenana. "Besides", he added, "I can easily gain access to yours." Durgadas challenged the boy to do it. "All right, we shall see", he replied and went away smiling.

One evening Durgadas was chatting with a number of friends, when a poorly dressed woman, her face hidden under a veil and with a basket on her arm, came and stood before them. She introduced herself by saying that she belonged to a weaver family of an adjacent village and had come to the market to sell yarn. Her friends had all gone home leaving her behind, and as it was impossible for her to return alone at that hour, she prayed that she might be allowed to pass the night in his family. Durgadas asked the woman a few questions and then said, "All right; go inside and speak to the ladies." The woman expressed her gratitude and went inside. The women, finding her young and of great simplicity, invited her to stay the night and gave her something to eat. She seated herself near by, and while partaking of the refreshments, scrutinized every room in the house, joining, now and then, in the conversation. Some three hours passed in this way. In the mean time, Chandra missed Gadadhar; when some hours elapsed and he was still absent, she became very anxious and sent Rameshwar in search of him. Rameshwar went first to Sitanath's house, for it was there that the boy spent most of his time. But he was not there. He sought him elsewhere calling his name aloud as he went. As he passed Durgadas's house, a voice from the women's quarters answered: "I am coming, brother." The women were amazed to find that the stranger was none other than Gadadhar in disguise. Durgadas, thus outwitted was at first annoyed but later, entered into the fun of the situation and congratulated the boy on his success. The ice being thus broken, the ladies of this family, too, began to frequent Sitanath Pyne's house when Gadadhar was there. And when he would fall into trances during the devotional songs, they would worship him, thinking that Krishna or Gaurânga was manifesting in that pure body. Later, they presented him with a gold flute and a complete outfit for both male and female parts. The women of the Pyne family cherished his memory during their whole lives; and when, in 1893, some of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to Kamarpukur, Rukmini, one of Sitanath's daughters, then sixty years old, gave the following interesting account of their association with Gadadhar: "You see our house there, a little to the north. It is now in a dilapidated state; and very few members of our family survive. I was then seventeen or eighteen years of age. Ours was a thriving family. Sitanath Pyne was my father, and we were altogether seventeen or eighteen sisters and cousins, all of about the same age. Gadadhar used to play with us from his very boyhood. We were, therefore, in terms of close intimacy with him. Even after we had married and come of age, he used to visit our house; and though he had grown up, he had free access to our inner apartments. My father loved him dearly and adored him like his own Ishta. 'You have so many girls at home,' complained some neighbours to my father, 'and Gadadhar is not young; why do you allow him to visit your family so frequently?' 'Don't you worry,' my father would reply, 'I know Gadadhar too well to think ill of him.' Gadadhar used to recite stories for us from the Puranas as we went about our daily household duties. How can I describe the bliss that we enjoyed in his company? If perchance he missed a day, we became extremely restless, thinking that he might be ill. One of us would go to Chandra Devi's on some pretext or other, whilst the others waited at home for news. His every word was a delight to our ears; the days he was unable to be with us we spent in talking of him."

Not only did he make an abiding impression on the women of the village, but he influenced the men also by his amiable character and versatile genius. He often joined them in the evening when they congregated for Kirtana or to read passages from the *Bhâgavata* or other holy books. There were several such centres in the village. No one in the village could read as he did or explain so lucidly. His fervour, frequent ecstatic moods, melodious voice, and graceful dancing sent a thrill of joy into the hearts of the villagers. And his merriment and jests were enjoyed by all.

Though Gadadhar was restless, buoyant, and merry, they were not blind to his wonderful intelligence and deep insight; and he often amazed them with his wisdom. He had the unusual power of seeing everything from a different angle, and was often able to solve questions when the wisest among the men of the village were unable to do so. He never hesitated to say exactly what he meant, which made hypocrites shun his company for fear of exposure. There were some few amongst the villagers who were fortunate enough to be able to recognise his great spiritual potentialities, and predicted a great future for him, although not the direction in which he would develop. An instance of this kind has already been narrated in connection with Shrinivas.

It was about this time that the idea seems to have come to him that he was destined to fulfil some great mission in life, he did not know what, though the realisation of God was to him even then the only purpose worthy of consideration. The monastic life had a strong attraction for him. Much as he would have liked to have taken up the begging bowl and renounced everything for the Lord's sake, the thought of the plight of his mother and brothers made him forgo his desire. In the struggle between the two ideas he was powerless to decide, and could do nothing but resign himself to the guidance of Raghuvir, fully believing that He would show the way out when the time came.

His aversion to school was becoming daily more pronounced, and he would have given it up but for his friends there, specially Gayavishnu. But a way to leave school without causing distress to any one unexpectedly presented itself. An amateur dramatic company was formed in the village, and Gadadhar was asked to join it and take the chief roles. As he did not have time for both school and study of the various dramatic presentations, he chose the thing that appealed to him, and was thus able to give up school with a clear conscience. The mango grove of Manik Raja was the place selected for rehearsals. Gadadhar not only played the chief roles, but took upon himself the task of training the other boys. Incidents from the lives of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna were dramatised. From the start, the project was a success. Gadadhar was in his element, and we are told of his frequent trances during the performances.

At this time Gadadhar showed marked talent in painting and clay modelling, though he had had no special training. His powerful concentration and intuitive idealism were great help. He would often surprise professional moulders by pointing out inaccuracies in the execution of some delicate part of an image, the eyes, for instance, and would direct them how to set them aright. In his ecstatic moods he saw various divine forms; and these visions, coupled with his artistic faculty, developed his critical faculty and enabled him to produce figures of great beauty.

Gadadhar was now seventeen years old, and Ramkumar was finding that he could not manage all his duties in Calcutta alone. Besides teaching in the Tol, he had to conduct the worship in a number of families. This increased his work so much that he felt the need of an assistant. On one of his visits to Kamarpukur he marked Gadadhar's peculiar indifference towards school; and when he learned that Gadadhar had given up his studies and was roaming the village with his friends and companions, he decided, after hurried consultation with his mother and Rameshwar, to take him to Calcutta, where he might supervise his studies and have his help in his household duties. Gadadhar readily agreed to this proposal, and on an auspicious[1] day he set out for Calcutta with the blessings of Raghuvir and his mother.

As he bade farewell to Kamarpukur and all its happy memories extending over a period of seventeen years, his heart was overpowered with grief. The future, with all its undisclosed possibilities, lay before him; and he was making a step forth into the unknown, leaving behind the security of home and the love of all his childhood friends, to say nothing of the aching void in the hearts of the men and women to whom he had come to mean so much.

This, in short, is the first of the four great acts in the drama about to unfold itself at Dakshineswar. To put it differently, it marked, as it were, the first stage of development of a gigantic banyan, the numerous branches of which were destined to afford shelter and comfort to millions of weary travellers in the wilderness of the world.

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[1] From the standpoint of astrology.

"BREAD-WINNING EDUCATION"

Gadadhar began to assist Ramkumar in his daily work. In the Tol Ramkumar taught astrology and Hindu law. The income from the school was not much; he could ill afford to forgo the money derived from officiating as family priest, little time as he had for it. When Gadadhar came to Calcutta, he was, therefore, entrusted with the duties of the priest, which he was glad to discharge. In a short time he made his influence felt in the families he visited. The heads of these families, particularly the women, found striking contrast in his behaviour to that of his predecessors. Instead of hurrying through his work, he would perform it with great diligence and conspicuous devotion; his honesty, rectitude, devotion, and purity of heart impressed all who came in contact with him. He would pass hours in these families either singing by request his favourite songs or rendering little services. The simplicity and integrity of his character removed all barriers to free association with them. Here, too, he soon formed a circle of friends and admirers, all belonging to respectable families, like that of the late Raja Digambar Mitter, in whose company he delighted to spend his time. Hence he did not have much leisure for his studies, and Ramkumar found that one of the objects in having the boy with him was being frustrated. For the first few months he gave the boy liberty, for he knew he was unaccustomed to any repression. In his native village he used to room at will and do whatever he liked. Now he was in new surroundings and amongst strange faces; and Ramkumar thought it best to be indulgent until his old friends and associations of Kamarpukur were forgotten. So he allowed him to enjoy the new friends so that he might forget the sorrow of separation from the old. But when, after some months, Gadadhar still showed no interest in his studies, Ramkumar thought it unwise to countenance any further laxity. The fortunes of the once prosperous Chatterjee family were fast dwindling, and it was necessary that Gadadhar become independent and add to the family income as well. Rameshwar, though a man of attainments, was not a money-maker. Gadadhar's behaviour did not warrant the hope that he would be any better. On the contrary, he manifested a complete indifference to worldly matters. One day Ramkumar took the boy aside and admonished him for his apathy towards education and his general indifference.

"Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education?"—was the spirited reply of the boy, "I would rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart and getting which one is satisfied for ever." Ramkumar did not realise the full import of this laconic answer, for he was ignorant of the inner psychology of this wonderful, precocious boy. Gadadhar looked at the world with a different eye. His brother's experience had somewhat reconciled him to the selfishness of the world. At home Gadadhar saw that the aim and purpose of average humanity was towards the senses; things seemed no different to him in Calcutta. A few months' stay in this city showed him clearly the drift of the people's minds as well as their motives. They were running after the transitory pleasures of the world and dying for name and fame. Enjoyment and the survival of the fittest were the watchwords of the day, and this precious human life was being wasted. God, spirituality, and religion were so many words the import of which had long been forgotten; and the holy books were the legacy of a superstitious ancestry, not worth the paper on which they were written. The education which Gadadhar was receiving tended in the same direction. Obviously it could not satisfy his mind, in which, in the midst of all his daily occupations, the idea was always uppermost that life had a deeper meaning. He realised more and more that he was born for purposes different from those of the ordinary run of men, that he must lead a life commensurate with those purposes. He asked himself, "Shall I obtain piety, devotion, and divine fervour by pursuing this education?" "No," was the emphatic reply. "Will it enable me to be as God-fearing and upright as my father?" "No," the reply echoed from his heart. "Shall I be able to realise God and escape from universal ignorance and clinging to the senses?" Again a negative answer. "Then what shall I do with this education which cannot help me to see God or to transcend the miseries of the world? I would rather remain ignorant all my life than throw away my cherished ideals by not following the path to God"—was the conclusion the boy reached. Bread and butter could not be the object of human life; they did not help towards release from disease, infirmity, and death. So the boy longed to acquire that wisdom which would take him across this ocean of life and death. In vain did he look for illumination in the pile of books in his brother's room, or in the scholars of the day: nothing but impervious darkness greeted his eyes. They could not show him the way to reach the goal.

So without a moment's hesitation he gave that reply to his brother's gentle reprimand. Ramkumar could scarcely believe his ears and was puzzled to know what to do. In vain did he try to convince the boy of the utility of learning, painting in glowing colours its bright prospects and the easy and happy life of the educated man of the city. These arguments made no appeal to Gadadhar's reason, nor did they cause him to budge from his position. Ramkumar had to give way for the time being.

Two years rolled on. Ramkumar's pecuniary condition instead of improving became worse; he found that sooner or later he would have to incur debts which he had no prospects of repaying. The hereditary profession of priesthood and teaching was not very lucrative, but knowing nothing else he had to cling to it. But he surrendered himself to the will of Raghuvir and let himself drift along the current of events, as he found it futile to struggle against it. When matters were approaching a climax, a new event, with far-reaching consequences in the life of young Gadadhar, coming from a most unexpected quarter, gave Ramkumar fresh courage.

THE DAKSHINESWAR TEMPLE

In the Jaun Bazaar quarter of Calcutta there lived a rich widow named Râni Râsmani, with four daughters. On the death of her husband, Râi Râj Chandra Dâs, she had inherited his immense properties, and so carefully and intelligently did she administer the affairs of the estate that she bequeathed it to her successor with increased revenues. Besides her business ability and courage, she was remarkable as well for devotion to God, faith in religion, and love and sympathy for the poor. To this day her extensive charities are still spoken of, and various eleemosynary works in and near Calcutta remain to testify to her generosity.

She was fortunate in having as son-in-law Mathurâ Mohan or Mathurâ Nâth Bishwâs, her peer in every respect and a competent assistant in the management of her affairs. He was married to the Rani's third daughter, on whose death he took the fourth, Jagadambâ Dâsi, as wife.

The goddess Kâli was Rani Rasmani's special object of devotion, her image even appearing on the seal of the estate. For many years she had the desire to make a pilgrimage to Banaras, and had even set aside money for the purpose, but the heavy burden of administration of the estate always stood in the way. But when Mathur signified his willingness to shoulder the burden, she proceeded to make arrangements to fulfil her heart's desire. Everything was in readiness, and the pilgrimage was to start on the morrow. That night the Rani had a dream in which the goddess appeared to her, ordered her to abandon the journey, and told her to build and dedicate a temple to Her on the banks of the Ganges. If this were done, She promised to manifest Herself there in the image set up.

Another account says that Rasmani had actually set out on the pilgrimage, and on her boat on the Ganges beside the village of Dakshineswar she had had her dream. Whatever the truth of the matter might be, she abandoned the idea of the pilgrimage and set about carrying out the divine injunction. In the year 1847 twenty acres of land at Dakshineswar on the Ganges were purchased from Mr. Hastie, an Attorney of the Calcutta Supreme Court; and the temple buildings, which took some eight years to complete, were begun.

Dakshineswar is four miles to the north of Calcutta. The Ganges flows by the west side of the temple garden, where its bathing ghât is located. A visitor coming by boat to see the temple first ascends these steps and enters a large open portico which is placed in the middle of a row of twelve Shiva temples, on the north and south of it. East of these there is a paved court, in the centre of which are two large temples, the one on the north, dedicated to Krishna and Radha and that on the south to the goddess Kali. In the latter, on a beautiful thousand-petalled silver lotus, lies the prostrate figure of Shiva on whose breast, facing the south, stands the Divine Mother known as Bhavatârini or the "Saviour of the world" chiselled out of a single piece of basalt. There are nine domes with spires to this temple. In front of it is the spacious music hall, a rectangular court, the gorgeous terrace of which is supported by stately pillars. On the south, east, and north sides of the courtyard are rooms used as quarters for the temple-staff, and store-rooms, kitchens, etc. In the north-west corner of the courtyard and immediately to the north of the row of Shiva temples is a chamber which is of special interest to us, for it was here that Sri Ramakrishna lived while in the temple. This room has a semi-circular verandah on the west, whence he could view the Ganges. In front of this balcony is a path running north and south; further west is the flower garden, and just beneath that flows the Ganges. Outside the temple compound proper, lying to the north of it, is a building which is used by the members of Rasmani's family when they visit the garden. There are two concert-rooms, one on the south-west and the other on the north-west corner of the temple compound. The garden is provided with two tanks, and many trees and plants add to its beauty. The most noticeable of these trees is the large banyan which played so conspicuous a part in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, and next in importance is the Bael tree on the northern extremity of the garden. We shall have occasion to refer to them later on.

The day fixed for the installation of the statue of the goddess was May 31st, 1855, a sacred day, known as Snânayâtrâ. Everything was ready, and the Rani's heart was filled with joy at the thought that the fulfilment of the Mother's promise to manifest Herself there and to bless her was so close at hand. But at the last moment, certain unforeseen obstacles arose which seemed to destroy her plans.

In this bustle of preparation for the dedication an important fact had been overlooked. The Rani was a Shudra by caste, and, therefore, no orthodox Brahmin would officiate as her priest, or partake of sacramental food in her temple, for according to the orthodox custom it was derogatory to a Brahmin to worship for a Shudra or to accept gifts from him. The Rani was in a dilemma, for not only could there be no installation ceremony without a priest, but a purpose she had secretly cherished for a long time of making an offering of cooked rice to her beloved Kali would be defeated as well, for the right of offering cooked rice was essentially a Brahminical one, not shared with the other castes; and if no priest could be found to dedicate the temple or to make the offering for her, things would be at a deadlock. But she was a woman of courage and determination, not to be daunted by even the greatest difficulties, and she sought the sanction of the Shâstras, writing to many Pundits for opinions. None of the replies was favourable. The Rani was in despair. The plans of a lifetime seemed to be coming to naught. It was at this moment that a letter came from Ramkumar in which he expressed the opinion that if the Rani made a gift of the Kali temple to a Brahmin, endowing it with sufficient funds for maintenance, it would be in keeping with the injunctions of the Shastras, and no Brahmin would be considered degraded by acting as priest or partaking of the food offered there. Though there was some grumbling amongst the Pundits at this opinion, the Rani was much pleased, not only at the liberality of the views expressed, but also at the opportunity it gave her to carry out her plans. Indeed such an opinion was heretical, and it required great courage on Ramkumar's part to voice it.

But the Shastric sanction alone was not sufficient. The Rani had to get a Brahmin sufficiently learned in the scriptures to perform the Puja ceremony in accordance with their injunctions. There were many difficulties in the way because of the rigidity of the caste system. A temple built by a Shudra woman was regarded with suspicion, and no high caste Brahmin would worship there, to say nothing of accepting the office of priest. Even though the Kali temple had been given over to a Brahmin, one acting as priest for a Shudra woman would lose honour with his fellow Brahmins.

It was Mahesh Chandra Chatterjee of Sihore, a friend of Ramkumar and an employee of Rani Rasmani, who cut the Gordian knot. He appointed Kshetra Nath, his elder brother, priest to the Râdhâkânta temple, knowing that if one Brahmin were willing to accept office there, others would follow his lead. To find a priest for the Kali temple was more difficult. In his extremity he thought of Ramkumar, whose scholarship and devotion he knew. But the difficulty with him was that he came of a very orthodox family that adhered rigidly to the rules and practices enjoined by the scriptures. But there was no time to lose, for the day of the consecration of the temple and the installation of the goddess was drawing near. Accordingly, Mahesh went to Rani Rasmani and asked her to send to Ramkumar through him an invitation to become priest of the Kali temple. The Rani wrote to Ramkumar as directed, saying that as it was due to his advice and suggestions that the consecration of the temple to Kali had been made possible, she depended upon him to extricate her from another awkward position, that of having no competent person to perform the opening ceremonies. She said further that such a sacred and responsible task could not be entrusted to every Brahmin, that a pious and learned person such as he was indispensable. Armed with this letter Mahesh went to see Ramkumar and explained the situation. He asked Ramkumar to take the place only until a competent priest would be found. Ramkumar agreed on this condition; but charmed by the kind and respectful treatment of the Rani and Mathur, he remained there till his death.

The day of consecration arrived. The ceremony was performed with great pomp. Thousands of beggars were fed sumptuously. Learned Brahmins were invited from afar to grace the occasion, and they were duly honoured. It is said that the Rani spent altogether nine lakhs of rupees for the construction of the temple and its opening ceremony. She further bought a large zemindary for two lakhs and twenty-six thousand rupees in the District of Dinajpur from Trailokya Nath Tagore, and set its income apart for the maintenance of the Kali temple by a deed of gift which she executed before her death.

The temple was consecrated. The Divine Mother who is Life and Consciousness itself was invoked to be permanently present in the beautiful stone image there. The dream of Rasmani was fulfilled, and her devoted heart was overjoyed. Her great devotion as well as the deep reverential attitude of the gifted priest soon made the image instinct, as it were, with life. The temple of Dakshineswar has ever since been a haven of peace to many. With its atmosphere of purity, its sequestered groves and bowers, the sacred Ganges flowing by, and, above all, the presence of a God-man who was soon to come to it and bless it for ever, this temple has become a place of pilgrimage and a favourite resort for thousands of devoted and contemplative devotees. Even now the lofty spires of the temples and tops of the tamarisk trees are pointed out to strangers by the boatmen as monuments to the piety of Rani Rasmani, and the pilgrims bow their heads in reverence before the Divine Mother and Her hallowed sanctum.

Sri Ramakrishna used often to tell of the events incident to the consecration ceremony to his disciples. He corroborated the stories of the Rani's arrangements for the pilgrimage to Banaras, the collection of a fleet of about one hundred boats filled with the necessary equipment, and the abandonment of the journey at the injunction of the Divine Mother in a dream the night before departure. He further used to say that Rani

Rasmani's search for a suitable place near Bâlly, Uttarpârâ, etc., on the west bank of the Ganges—considered very holy—proved futile, as the zemindars of those places, even when offered enormous prices, refused to permit a ghat on the Ganges within their jurisdiction. He used to remark that the plot selected at Dakshineswar for the temple happened to be an abandoned cemetery and had a convex surface, which according to the Tantras were good features for a place of Shakti-worship. He also told of how Rani Rasmani, from the beginning of the moulding of the image, practised the utmost austerity in food, sleep, and general mode of living, and performed worship and Japa, etc., to the best of her power, that she was forced to fix the date of consecration hurriedly on a full-moon day—which was more appropriate to the worship of Vishnu than that of Shakti—as the image of the goddess, which was locked up in a box, for some unknown reason was covered with a deposit of mist, and the Rani was told in a dream by the goddess to have the installation ceremony at an early date, as She could no longer endure the box. The Master also confirmed the truth of the story that the Rani conveyed the temple to her spiritual guide to overcome the difficulties arising from her being of a low caste. He would tell of the great pomp with which the ceremony was performed, of the gorgeousness of the illumination etc., of how the whole place rang with Kirtanas, dramatic performances and recitals from the sacred books.

Sri Ramakrishna—henceforth we shall call him by this more familiar name[1]—though he enjoyed the festival, did not partake of any food in the temple, but purchased and ate a pice worth of puffed rice in the evening before his return to the Tol at Jhamapukur. When he found that Ramkumar, instead of returning to his school work, stayed on at the temple, he was much disturbed. He went to Dakshineswar to ascertain the reason and found that Ramkumar, unable to withstand the importunities and kindnesses of the Rani, had accepted the permanent office of priest there. He tried to influence his brother against such a course reminding him of his father's steadfast observance of the traditions of the Chatterjees, and telling him that he would be the first to tarnish the fair fame of their family, which had always been revered for its refusal of gifts from the Shudras, to say nothing of accepting any position from them. Ramkumar was adamant and quoted from the scriptures to justify himself, trying by every means in his power to make his brother agree with him, but to no avail. As a last resort they drew lots after the fashion of country folk; and Ramkumar won. Accepting this as final Sri Ramakrishna still refused to take food in the temple. At last Ramkumar told him to take rice and vegetables from the temple stores and to do his own cooking on the banks of the Ganges. Ramakrishna yielded. From this time on, he stayed at Dakshineswar with his brother, but he continued to cook and eat his food apart for some time.

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[1] Ramakrishna is the name, supplanting his old one, which gained currency during the Master's stay at Dakshineswar. No definite information as to its origin is available. Most probably it was given by Mathur Babu, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, as Ramlal, the nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, says on the authority of his illustrious uncle himself.

He soon accommodated himself to his new surroundings. The holy atmosphere of that sequestered place, the affectionate care of his elder brother, the respect of Rani Rasmani and Mathur, and lastly his conviction of the presence of the goddess there captured his heart.

Throughout his life Sri Ramakrishna cherished a great devotion to the Ganges. He would often say, "The water of the Ganges is as pure as Brahman. Even an agnostic attains devotion if he but lives on its banks. The whole area over which the wind charged with particles of its water blows is sanctified, and the residents of that area are spiritually awakened without any effort." If any one of his devotees indulged in worldly talk or associated with worldly people, the Master would ask him to drink a little Ganges water. If any spot were vitiated by the touch of an exceptionally worldly man, he would have it sprinkled with Ganges water. This devotion to the Ganges was ingrained in him from boyhood. So when Ramkumar appealed to him in the name of the Ganges, all doubts regarding the food disappeared from his mind. Some may condemn this attitude of Sri Ramakrishna towards the temple Prasâd, calling it bigoted. But it was nothing of the sort. It was due to his steadiness in devotion (Nishthâ) to the ideals inculcated by his caste and family as well as by the Shastras. Nevertheless, it was this devotion to the ideal as understood at the time that eventually carried him to the point where he perceived that anything offered to and accepted by the Mother, must, of necessity, be pure. As his knowledge increased and his vision enlarged, all differentiating ideas of caste and creed automatically dropped off. What an object lesson for us is this seemingly trifling incident!

BEFORE THE DIVINE MOTHER

It was not long before Mathur noticed the presence of a strange young man of fair and striking devotion in the Kali temple. As he observed the youth going about his daily duties, he felt strangely drawn to him. This attraction towards a poor, humble, unostentatious Brahmin boy puzzled Mathur. He made enquiries about Sri Ramakrishna and found that he was the youngest brother of Ramkumar. A desire arose in his mind to connect Sri Ramakrishna, too, in some way with the work in the Kali temple, and he even spoke of his desire to Ramkumar. The latter was not very enthusiastic, for he knew his brother's strange psychology, his indifference to pecuniary gain and personal pleasure, and the spirit of independence and desire for freedom which made him dislike routine work. Though discouraged, Mathur gave up the idea for the time being only, hoping that later some opportunity would come which would enable him to gratify his desire.

It was at this time that Hriday, a young man destined to be a close companion of Sri Ramakrishna for twenty-five years, a faithful attendant during the stormy days of his Sâdhanâ, a sincere friend in all his troubles of this period, and a mute witness of his various divine realisations, appeared on the scene. He was the son of Hemangini Devi, who was the daughter of Khudiram's sister. He was slightly younger than his uncle and had been one of his boyhood chums. As a boy Sri Ramakrishna went often to Sihore to visit him. At the time of which we are speaking, Hriday was sixteen years of age. He could find no employment in his native village; in the nearest town of Burdwan he had no better luck. Then he remembered that his uncles were living in the newly established Kali temple of Rani Rasmani and thought that through their influence some employment might be offered to him. So he joined them at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was delighted. Hriday, knowing his uncle's nature, made no comment on any of his actions. As he said later, he felt the magnetism of his uncle's towering personality and followed him about like his shadow. They performed all their tasks together, separating only at meal time. Sri Ramakrishna cooked the food (prepared for him by Hriday) on the bank of the Ganges while Hriday took his dinner in the Kali temple.

It seemed almost a divine dispensation that Hriday Ram came to Dakshineswar. He was a very clever man, with great presence of mind, exceptionally energetic and always ready to bear cheerfully any personal discomfort if thereby he could help his uncle. And he became quite indispensable to Sri Ramakrishna during his period of God-intoxication, when, lost in Samadhi, he was absolutely incapable of taking care of his body.

At this time, Sri Ramakrishna became aware of the fact that Mathur was keeping him under observation, and of his designs to make him one of the Kali temple priests; so he avoided him whenever possible. But one day, as he was worshipping, in the compound of the Kali temple, an image of Shiva moulded by himself, Mathur, taking advantage of his absorption, was able to come close enough to see the image. The perfection of its modelling impressed him so much that he made inquiries as to who was the sculptor. When he learned that it had been made by Sri Ramakrishna, he was delighted, and begged that the image might be given to him after the worship was over. He again approached

Ramkumar on the subject of attaching his brother to the Kali temple staff, and in spite of a second refusal, was more determined than ever to acquire the services of Sri Ramakrishna in the worship of Kali.

Sri Ramakrishna's apathetic attitude towards work in the temple was due to his intense conviction that nothing was worth doing but the conquest of the flesh, renunciation of wealth, and the attainment of God-consciousness. But this avoidance of Mathur could not go on for ever. Living as Sri Ramakrishna did in the temple garden, it was inevitable that, sooner or later, they would meet. One day the encounter took place. Mathur saw Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday talking together near the Kali temple; before Sri Ramakrishna could make his escape, he sent for him. When Sri Ramakrishna hesitated Hriday asked him why he was reluctant to respond to the command. "When I do so, he will ask me to take up some duties in the temple," said Sri Ramakrishna. "What harm is there in that?" asked Hriday, "He is a good and pious man, and it is no discredit to work for him." Sri Ramakrishna quietly said, "I have no intention of being bound for life. Besides, the service in the Kali temple implies a heavy responsibility, for I would have to take charge of the valuable ornaments of the goddess, and it would worry me. If you agree to take that responsibility, I may accede to Mathur Babu's request." Hriday agreed, for he had come to Dakshineswar in search of suitable employment, and here it was. Sri Ramakrishna spoke with Mathur and, when requested to accept service in the Kali temple, agreed to do so on the above terms. These were accepted, and Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday were appointed to the positions. Sri Ramakrishna took over the dressing and decorating of the Divine Mother, Hriday assisting Ramkumar and Sri Ramakrishna.

Soon after his appointment in the Kali temple, an incident occurred which enhanced the worth of Sri Ramakrishna in the eyes of Rani Rasmani and Mathur. It was the custom in the Dakshineswar temple to put the images of Krishna and Radha in the next room between services. They were replaced on the throne in the morning and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. On the day following the Janmâshtami[1] festival, the priest, Kshetra Nath, was taking the image of Krishna to the retiring room, when he slipped on the marble floor, and one leg of the image was broken. This gave rise to a great commotion in the temple. Poor Kshetra Nath was immediately dismissed for carelessness. The incident was considered an evil omen for the family. A broken image could not be worshipped; and when the news was sent to Rani Rasmani, she was greatly disturbed. She consulted Mathur and convened a gathering of the Pundits to advise her what to do. After a great deal of discussion the conclusion was reached that it was contrary to the scriptures to worship the Lord in a broken image, that the Rani must throw it into the Ganges and install a new one in its place. A new image was at once ordered. But the Rani was extremely reluctant to consign the object of her former worship to the Ganges, and at the suggestion of Mathur, who had been deeply impressed by Sri Ramakrishna's trances, she sought the latter's opinion on the matter. After hearing the whole story Sri Ramakrishna in an exalted mood exclaimed, "Their solution is ridiculous. If a son-in-law of the Rani fractured his leg, would she discard him and put another in his stead? Would she not rather arrange for his treatment? Why not do the same thing here? Let the image be repaired and worshipped as before." When this startling solution was communicated to the Pundits they were puzzled. Because it proceeded straight from the heart, it was so convincing, although so simple. It did not satisfy the scholars at first, but they finally had to yield. Rani Rasmani was jubilant. She had already seen the proof of the young priest's skill in sculpture, so she begged him to mend the broken image. He consented and repaired the limb so adroitly, that even careful scrutiny did not reveal where the break had been. When the new image arrived, Mathur took it to Sri Ramakrishna and asked if it were exactly like the original; Sri Ramakrishna fell into a trance and said, "No, it is not." So it was set aside. A new priest was needed to fill the vacancy caused by the dismissal of Kshetra Nath, and Mathur requested Ramkumar to persuade Sri Ramakrishna to accept the post. Sri Ramakrishna consented. Hriday was appointed to help Ramkumar to dress and decorate the image of Kali.

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[1] The anniversary of Sri Krishna's birthday.

FIRST VISION OF THE DIVINE MOTHER

Silently and secretly they come into the world, like a flash of lightning, survey it, and in the twinkling of an eye disappear: few see them, fewer understand them, and still fewer follow their advice. This is the life-history of most great men—prophets, seers, and Incarnations—in all ages and in all climes. Christ died on the cross like an ordinary felon. Of his twelve disciples, one denied him in the hour of trial. Now millions accept him as their ideal. Buddha left behind him only a handful of followers, and today after twenty-five centuries one-third of the world pays him homage. Yet why should we wonder at the world's lack of comprehension? How can we understand them with our limited vision? The strong alone can understand strength: it is not the barn-door fowl but the elephant that understands the lion. Only grandeur appreciates grandeur: and God realises God. Though the real Christ and Buddha are in us, it is not until we realise that fact, that we can envisage a Buddha or a Christ. But let the perception come that liberation or bondage, virtue or vice, knowledge or ignorance, beauty or ugliness, truth or falsehood, pleasure or pain, and all the other pairs of opposites which seem so real to us are nothing but the creation of the mind—the obverse and reverse of the same coin—and a change will be made in the angle of vision, a shifting of the mental focus, and the whole series of phenomena—father, mother, home, me, and mine—will vanish, to give place to another series of phenomena, another creation, and another world, to which the Great

Ones have easy access, and where they would have us dwell.

We are now about to enter a new chapter in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, the beauty, grandeur, loftiness, and pathos of which will fascinate the readers as they follow step by step the progress of this eager aspirant from the early outpourings of his heart in devotion at the feet of the Divine Mother, through the period of his unquenchable thirst to see Her, on to the consummation of his Sadhana in the realisation of God, and the establishment—or rather rediscovery—of his relation to him,—a sublime achievement equalled only by that of the other Great Ones of the world. We wish we might be able to express an infinitesimal part of his throbbing renunciation, tremendous sincerity, and passionate search for God. So great was his yearning for God that twelve strenuous years passed in a state of divine intoxication, during half of which period he did not close his eyes in sleep. Unconscious of hunger, thirst, or any of the cravings of the body, or of the things happening around him, Sri Ramakrishna, during that period of Sadhana, was almost like a madman. Day after day, month after month, year after year, he was immersed in the depths of that intense spiritual fervour.

Sri Ramakrishna was appointed priest of the Râdhâ-Kânta[1] temple. Mathur found that his mode of worship was different from that of the ordinary Brahmins, in that he looked upon the image as the veritable representation of God and treated it as such. When he sat down to worship, a curtain of oblivion separated him from the outside world: he was totally unconscious of the presence of those who usually gathered to attend the services. Sometimes he would sit motionless for hours, being recalled with difficulty to ordinary consciousness. While uttering the various Mantras he could distinctly see those phenomena which to the ordinary priest were but phantoms of the imagination. Thus while chanting the mystic syllable *Rang,* which directed the priest to conceive of a wall of fire around him, Sri Ramakrishna really found himself in the midst of a circle of fire guarding himself and the place of worship from all evil influence. He could actually feel the mystic power called the Kundalini, or the "coiled up", rushing from its place of rest at the lower extremity of the spinal coulmn, along the channel of the Sushumnâ, to what the Yogis call the Sahasrâra or the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain, and could visualise it passing on its upward way through the six centres of the body in the spinal cord, turning the hanging buds of the "lotuses"[1] into erect, full-blown flowers. The radiant glow of his face at the time of worship, his deep concentration and the atmosphere of purity about him suggested to the on-lookers the idea that the very spirit of Brâhmanahood as described in the sacred books was being manifested there. None had ever seen such intensity of feeling and devotion.

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[1] Radha-Kanta is another name for Krishna.

Sri Ramakrishna adapted himself to his new station and forgot everything else. Ramkumar was gratified, for it gave him time to direct his attention to the welfare of the family; besides he felt that his end was approaching; and if one of his brothers succeeded him, the future of the family would be assured. But he was troubled by Sri Ramakrishna's love for solitude and growing indifference to the world. He hoped that it was a passing mood, and that he would begin to take part in the festivities of the Kali temple, instead of passing his leisure hours in the thick groves of the temple garden, sitting silent under a tree far away from the bustle, or, worse still, taking long solitary walks in the quiet of the early morning or before dusk, along the banks of the Ganges. He resolved to teach him the elaborate procedure of the worship of Kali, so that, later, he might assume the task. As it was not considered advisable to undertake the worship of Shakti or Kali without being properly initiated, Sri Ramakrishna decided to be initiated. At this time there was a Brahmin in Calcutta named Kenârâm Bhattâchârya, who was noted for his devotion and experience, and Sri Ramakrishna decided to accept him as Guru. A day was fixed, and the ceremony took place. It is said that as soon as the sacred Mantra was uttered in his ears, Sri Ramakrishna, overwhelmed with religious fervour, gave a shout and plunged into a deep concentration, which greatly astonished the Guru.

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[1] This refers to the path of Râja-Yoga which has to do with the development of the different centres of the spinal cord. In mystical language these centres are called lotuses.

From this time on Ramkumar asked his brother now and then to take over the worship of the Divine Mother, while he himself worshipped at the altar of Radha-Kanta instead. Mathur noticed this and one day requested Sri Ramakrishna to take over the permanent worship of Kali. "Sir, I do not know the procedure of that worship," he replied, "so how can I perform the sacred task according to the injunctions of the Shastras?" But Mathur humbly said, "You do not require any Shâstric code; your great devotion and sincerity alone will satisfy the goddess. Whatever you offer at the feet of the Mother with love, She will accept. Because of your devotion the Mother will surely manifest Herself through this image." Sri Ramakrishna, touched at the implicit faith of Mathur, agreed, and Ramkumar was transferred to the temple of Radha-Kanta. Ramkumar was aged now, and the sustained labour at the temple garden was telling on his health; he decided to go home for a change. Mathur agreed to engage Hriday for a few months during Ramkumar's absence, and the latter arranged to start home as soon as possible. But he was destined never to see his home or dear relatives again, for he breathed his last at a place a few miles north of Calcutta, where he had gone on urgent business. He had served in the Kali temple of Dakshineswar for only a year.

The death of Ramkumar left an indelible impression upon the mind of Sri Ramakrishna. He was so young at the time of his father's death that all his filial affection was given to his elder brother. His death, therefore, came as a great shock to him, for it occurred at a time when his mind was in a state of upheaval—when he was fast realising the transitoriness of the phenomenal world and all his energies were given to the search for something that was real and imperishable. Convinced that man could transcend all miseries and evils and reach immortality only by knowing the sweet and perennial fountain of all bliss, his yearning to realise God and the pangs of separation from Him became inexpressible. While those about him were wasting time in all sorts of frivolity, he was burning day and night with this consuming thirst for God. It was at this time that he was asked to conduct the services of the Divine Mother. After his initiation, Kali became his favourite Deity. Every day at the time of worship he decorated Her image with flowers and sandal-paste; to him it was not inert stone but Mother Herself. All who have seen it agree that the lovely figure, with its divine expression, is a rare piece of sculpture. The Mother wears a gorgeous Banaras cloth and is decorated with precious ornaments from head to foot. From Her neck hangs a garland of skulls and round Her waist is a girdle of human arms—made of gold. In Her lower left hand She holds a decapitated human head, also made of gold, and in the upper a sword. With Her lower right hand She offers boons to Her devotees; with the upper is symbolised, "Fear nothing!" The skulls and the sword represent Her terrible side, and Her right hands offering boons and fearlessness the benignant side. She is both terrible and sweet—like Nature—alternately destroying and creating. This is the Mother whom Sri Ramakrishna worshipped, the Preserver as well as the Destroyer. But to him She was ever the affectionate Mother—the Repository of all blessedness and power—sweet, tender, and full of motherly solicitude, the Mother who with loving care protects Her devotees from harm. To Her he offered a whole-hearted devotion, regarding Her as the only true guide in darkness and confusion.

So sensitive was he becoming, that he was forced to avoid all contacts with so-called worldly people. He passed the quiet hours of the afternoon alone. At night, when everyone was asleep he would arise and go out, returning after day-break, with eyes swollen as though with much weeping, or showing the effects of prolonged meditation. To all enquiries as to where he had been he gave evasive answers. Hriday determined to watch him and solve the mystery.

The plot of land lying to the north of the temple, where Sri Ramakrishna passed long years in meditation and asceticism, now known as the Panchavati, was not then as it is now. It was a dense jungle of low, uneven land thickly grown with shrubs and prickly plants, where the sunshine scarcely ever penetrated. Its having been a graveyard kept people at a respectful distance, and none had ever dared to explore it. Sri Ramakrishna chose this place for his spiritual practices and used to spend his afternoons and nights in meditation in the shade of a large Âmalaka tree which grew there.

Hriday loved his uncle and took care of him day and night like a devoted servant. Occasionally he caught a glimpse of the workings of his mind; but for the most part, he shared the popular opinion that Sri Ramakrishna's strange actions were due to too intense devotion to God. So when to unmindfulness of food or drink or the comforts of the body was added the passing of whole nights without sleep, Hriday was much concerned and felt that he was justified in watching his uncle to find out where he went at night and how he spent his time. Knowing that opposition or protest was futile, he waited his opportunity; and one night, when Sri Ramakrishna left his room, he followed. What was his horror to see him entering the jungle!

Hriday was afraid to follow him, so he remained at a distance and began to throw stones in order to frighten Sri Ramakrishna, but without success. The following morning, when questioned by Hriday as to what he did in the jungle, Sri Ramakrishna replied quietly, "There is a large Amalaka tree there, and under it I meditate on Kali. Such a place is highly suitable for meditation." Hriday was not satisfied with this explanation and continued to spy upon and throw stones at Sri Ramakrishna whenever he went into the jungle. Sri Ramakrishna made no remonstrance. Finding that intimidation was fruitless, Hriday gathered up his courage and determined to enter the jungle at dead of night to see for himself what was going on. He was startled to find his uncle, without clothes or the sacred thread, under the tree in deep meditation. In spite of a feeling of awe with which this sight inspired him, Hriday said to Sri Ramakrishna, "What is this, uncle? Why have you taken off your cloth and the sacred thread?" There was no response. It was as if he were addressing a statue. When Sri Ramakrishna returned to ordinary consciousness, Hriday repeated the question. "Why, don't you know," Sri Ramakrishna replied, "that this is the way one should think of God, free of all ties? Since our very birth we have the eightfold fetters of hatred, shame, pedigree, culture, fear, fame, caste, and egoism. This sacred thread means that I am a Brahmin and, therefore, superior to all. When calling upon the Mother, one has to set such ideas aside. So I have removed the holy thread, which I shall put on after I have finished meditation." Hriday listened and quietly left the place.

Thus the realisation of God—the vision of the Divine Mother—became the one passion of Sri Ramakrishna. Strange was the method of worship of this most wonderful devotee. The singing of devotional songs composed by such devotees as Râmprasâd and Kamalâkânta of Bengal was one of its salient features. They seemed to open the flood-gate of his heart, and he would weep profusely like a child sore at heart at the separation from its mother. "O Mother! Where art Thou? Reveal Thyself to me. Ramprasad saw Thee and obtained Thy divine grace. Am I a wretch that Thou dost not come to me? Pleasure, wealth, friends, enjoyments—I do not want any of these. I only desire to see Thee, Mother." Tears flowed continuously from his eyes. The day would pass; and when the peal of evening bells in the temple announced the close of day, he would become sadder still and cry, "Another day is spent in vain, Mother, for I have not seen Thee! Another day of this short life has passed, and I have not realised the Truth!" He would often rub his face against the ground in his agony. His plaintive moans would attract crowds of people, who whispered to one another, "Poor young man! Has he really lost his mother? His pathetic cries move one to tears." In another mood he would sit before the image of Kali and say to Her, "Art Thou true, Mother, or is it all a fiction of the mind—mere poetry without any reality? If Thou dost exist, why can I not see Thee? Is religion, then, a phantasy, a mere castle in the air?" Scarcely would these words pass his lips when in a flash he would recollect the lives of Ramprasad and other devotees who actually saw God in this very life. "She can't be a mere freak of the human imagination," the young worshipper would think, "there are people who have actually seen Her. Then why can't I see Her? Life is passing away. One day is gone followed by another never to return. Every day I am drawing so much nearer to death. But where is my Mother? The scriptures say that there is only one thing to be sought in this life, and that is God. Without Him life is unbearable, a mockery. When God is realised, life has a meaning, it is a pleasure, a veritable garden of ease. Therefore in pursuit of God sincere devotees renounce the world and sacrifice their lives. What is this life worth if I am to drag on a miserable existence from day to day without tapping that eternal source of Immortality and Bliss?" Thoughts like these would only increase his longing, and make him redouble his efforts to realise God.

Referring to this tremendous thirst for God Sri Ramakrishna would often say to his disciples later on. "Oh, what days of suffering I passed through! You can't imagine my agony at separation from Mother. That was only natural. Suppose there is a bag of gold in a room and a thief in the next with only a thin partition between. Can he sleep peacefully? Will he not run about and try to force the wall to get at the gold? Such was my state. I knew that the Mother, full of infinite bliss, compared with which all earthly possessions were as nothing, was there, quite close to me. How could I be satisfied with anything else? I had to seek Her. I became mad for Her."

What tremendous faith, what intense conviction that God alone is the source of all bliss! This it was that carried him through and sustained him in many bitter trials and afflictions—the philosopher's stone that turned his sufferings into the bright and shining gold of God-consciousness. It is to faith such as this that the miracles in the spiritual history of the world, in all countries are due. Without a teacher, guide, or helper, with no great knowledge of the scriptures, and even without passing through the prescribed forms of asceticism, Sri Ramakrishna carried everything before him by this adamantine faith and sincere yearning to realise God.

He could no longer conduct the worship regularly. He would sit before the image like a stone. At one moment he behaved like a demented person, at the next he would cry like a child. While meditating in the course of worship, he would put a flower on his head and sit silent for a couple of hours; or while offering the food, he would gaze at the Mother as if She were actually partaking of it. In the morning he would pluck the flowers for garlands and spend hours in decorating the image. During the evening service, when waving lights before the Goddess, he would lose all idea of time and forget to bring the ceremony to a close. His strange actions were beginning to attract the attention of the temple officials. He was ridiculed at first; but steady devotion ended by commanding respect and admiration, though some still regarded him as unbalanced. Mathur was charmed. Sri Ramakrishna was perfectly indifferent to what people thought and directed all his energies to the realisation of the goal he had set for himself. He took less food and slept very little. His chest and face were always flushed from excessive emotion, the eyes often bathed in tears.

But he was not to be tossed much longer on the waves of despair and hope. One day, in his intense longing to see the Mother, he cried, "Mother, why dost Thou not listen to me? I have prayed long to Thee. Thou didst bless Ramprasad. Why dost Thou not bless me also by revealing Thyself to me?"—when, suddenly, his desire was fulfilled. We shall describe this first vision of the Divine Mother in his own words:

"I was then suffering from excruciating pain because I had not been blessed with a vision of the Mother. I felt as if my heart were being squeezed like a wet towel. I was overpowered by a great restlessness and a fear that it might not be my lot to realise Her in this life. I could not bear the separation any longer: life did not seem worth living. Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother's temple. Determined to put an end to my life, I jumped up like a madman and seized it, when suddenly the blessed Mother revealed Herself to me, and I fell unconscious on the floor. What happened after that externally, or how that day or the next passed, I do not know, but within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother."

On another occasion he gave the following description of the same experience:

"The buildings with their different parts, the temple and all vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead was a limitless, infinite, effulgent ocean of Consciousness or Spirit. As far as the eye could reach, its shining billows were madly rushing towards me, from all sides with a terrific noise, to swallow me up! In the twinkling of an eye they were on me and engulfed me completely. I was panting for breath. I was caught in the billows and fell down senseless!"

Whether or not he saw in this ocean of effulgence that blissful form of the Divine Mother which was so dear to his heart, he did not make clear. It is probable that he did, for as soon as he regained consciousness, he called aloud, "Mother! Mother!"

From this time on, his constant prayer was that he might have a repetition of this vision. Sometimes his desire would become so intense that he would roll on the ground, crying, "Mother, be gracious unto me and reveal Thyself once more." He would cry so bitterly that people gathered about him to see. "I scarcely realised their presence," the Master afterwards said, "they looked more like shadows or painted pictures than real objects, and I did not feel the least abashed at displaying my feelings before them. But the moment I lost outward consciousness in a paroxysm of pain at separation from the Mother, I would find Her standing before me in Her matchless radiant form, granting boons to Her devotees and bidding them be of good cheer! I used to see Her smiling, talking, consoling, or teaching me in various ways."

GOD-INTOXICATED STATE

The period subsequent to Sri Ramakrishna's first realisation of the Divine Mother was quite naturally replete with thrilling incidents of a spiritual nature. He was just stepping into a new realm, vast and limitless. Every day he had extraordinary visions, some of them while in the trance state, others in normal consciousness. Though he lived and moved in this world, he belonged in reality to another region and held communion with strange invisible beings. He was often seen conversing with the stone image of Kali as if it were fully conscious. To the people of the Kali temple all this looked like madness pure and simple. His nephew concluded that the great nervous strain of his Sadhanas had caused some derangement in the brain, and the physician to the Rajas of Bhukailâs was consulted. Sri Ramakrishna remained under his treatment for some time, but with no benefit.

The physical shock of the first vision of the Mother was so great that for a time he lost control over his body. When he was calmer and attempted to conduct the worship of the goddess, it would always take unexpected turns. Strange visions and thoughts flashed before him. Before beginning to meditate he would say to himself, "I shall sit silent and unmoved like that image of Bhairava[1]." Sri Ramakrishna afterwards described what would happen: "I could distinctly hear strange rattling sounds in my joints from the ankle upwards, as if one were locking them up one by one, so that the body might remain fixed. I remained perforce in that position till the end of the meditation, when the same rattling sounds would again be heard as the joints were unlocked in the reverse orders. Not until this was done could I move or stand up. Sometimes I saw specks of light like a swarm of fireflies before my eyes, at other times a veil of luminous mist would envelop me. Again I would see, with closed as well as open eyes, luminous waves like molten silver pervading everything. Not knowing what these meant, or whether they were helpful or detrimental to my spiritual progress, I would lay open my heart to Mother saying, "Mother, I don't know what these things are. I am ignorant of Mantras and all other things requisite to realisation of Thee. Teach me, Mother, how to realise Thee. Who else can help me? Art thou not my only refuge and guide?' This was my earnest prayer night and day. I used to weep bitterly in the extremity of my grief."

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[1] A stone image which was set like a sentinel on the parapet of the hall in front of the Kali Temple.

Though the young priest was blessed with the vision of his Divine Mother, the goal of his endeavours, yet it did not give him unmixed joy, for it was not continuous. He could get a glimpse of Her only in meditation or through some effort; to him this could only mean one thing—that his realisations were not true, else they would surely be without effort and uninterrupted. Could it be that his thirst after God, intense as it was, was half-hearted? Thoughts such as these made him redouble his efforts and increase his prayers to the Divine Mother.

From this time onward his attitude towards the Mother changed. He became like a little child, confident that his inability to see Her whenever he wished was because She, in a playful mood, was purposely hiding Herself. He felt that, ere long, She would take him in Her arms, that he would no longer be permitted to stray in the labyrinths of the world. He was learning to resign himself to Her will, to check the impulses of his own ego and to let Her will direct him. His self-surrender was complete. "O Mother," he would pray day and night, "I have taken refuge in Thee; teach me what to do or say. Thy will is paramount everywhere and is for the benefit of Thy children. Merge my ego in Thy will and make me Thy instrument." His actions were much criticised. But what was that to him? Was not the Mother leading him by the hand? This material world was fast losing its reality for him, and the presence of the Divine Mother was the only thing he cared for.

As his realisation deepened, the vision of the Mother became continuous. Formerly at the time of meditation it was with difficulty that he gained a glimpse of Her beautiful hand, feet, or face; now he saw Her entire form as She spoke to him and directed him in his day's work. Heretofore, while offering food to Her, a luminous ray from Her eyes would touch it, merely taking its essence; now he saw Her partake of the food even before it was offered in the regular way. Formerly he regarded the stone image of Kali as possessed of consciousness; now the image disappeared, and in its stead there stood the Living Mother Herself, smiling and blessing him. "I actually felt Her breath on my hand," the Master used to say later on: "At night when the room was lighted, I never saw Her divine form cast any shadow on the walls, even though I looked closely. From my own room I could hear Her going to the upper storey of the temple with the delight of a girl, Her anklets jingling. To see if I were not mistaken, I would follow and find Her standing with flowing hair on the balcony of the first floor, looking either at Calcutta or out over the Ganges."

It was thus that Sri Ramakrishna became a God-intoxicated man. The separation between him and the Divine Mother was gradually vanishing, and he was fast attaining to a state of uninterrupted vision of Her. And his zeal was commensurate with this great development; his earnestness overcame all obstacles. He forgot all the formalities of the scriptures in his intimate communion with the Mother. He gave up the elaborate forms of prayer with which the novitiate tries to approach God; it became instead a ceaseless outpouring of his heart, in a persistent demand to see Her, or a passionate exchange of words with Her. He no longer kept himself at a respectful distance from the image, or approached it with a timid heart, or made prostrations as he entered the temple. Who acts thus with his own mother? Is she an object of awe to her son? We cannot establish the sweet filial relation with the Divine Mother—more loving, more affectionate, and more indulgent than any earthly mother can ever be—if we associate the ideas of fear and dreadfulness with Her. As the Mother She is no longer grim and fearful as in Her dance of death, but appears to Her devotees in a majestic, gracious form full of sweetness and love, showering benediction upon all and opening up their understanding.

This was the blessed Mother whom Sri Ramakrishna Deva had realised. Hriday was able to give many interesting details of those days. He used to say, "Whenever one entered the temple, a thrill would be felt, specially when my uncle was worshipping, as though there were a living Presence there. I could never resist the temptation of watching him. His strange manner of worship filled me with wonder and reverence, at the same time

I often questioned his sanity, for his actions were contrary to the injunctions of the Shastras. I was much afraid also of what Rani Rasmani and Mathur Babu would do if the news of his conduct reached them. But Sri Ramakrishna was perfectly insensible to my feelings, and even when told of how strange his actions seemed, was indifferent. Nor could I talk freely as heretofore with him about such matters, for an inexplicable constraint checked me, and I felt a deep gulf between him and me. So I served him as best as I could, fearful lest his extraordinary ways should bring on disaster."

Of Sri Ramakrishna's method of worship, he would say, "I noticed that my uncle, taking flowers and Bael leaves in his hand, touched his own head, chest, in fact, the whole body, including the feet, with them and then offered them at the feet of Kali. At other times, with eyes and chest flushed, like a drunkard he would move with tottering steps from his seat to the throne of the goddess, touch her chin as a sign of endearment, and begin to sing, or talk, joke, laugh, or even dance, taking the image by the hand! Sometimes he would approach the throne with a morsel of food in his hand and putting it to Her lips entreat Her to eat. Then would follow this interesting conversation, 'Well, Thou wishest me to take it—shall I eat now? Very well, I shall do so!' Then he would eat a portion of it and put the remainder to the mouth of the goddess and say, 'Well, I have eaten—now it is Thy turn.' One day a cat near by was mewing as he was making the food-offering. He tenderly addressed it saying, 'Mother, art Thou eager to eat? Here, Thou mays't have it,' at the same time giving the food to the cat. Sometimes at the end of the evening service, when he had invoked the Mother to retire, he would say, 'Well, Thou dost wish me to lie down? Very well, I shall do it,' and would lie for some time on the silver bedstead meant for the Mother. Again, at the time of worship he would become so deeply absorbed in meditation that there would be no sign of external consciousness. Every morning, as he picked the flowers for the Divine Mother's garlands I saw him speaking to, or caressing somebody, or laughing, or indulging in merriment! He never closed his eyes during the night; whenever I awoke I found him in exalted mood, talking to someone, singing, or sitting in deep meditation where the Panchavati is now."

All these but confirmed the belief of the local authorities that Sri Ramakrishna must be mad. What they saw amounted to sacrilege. Offering flowers to the Divine Mother after touching one's feet with them, partaking of the food before it was offered to Her, lying in the bedstead of the Mother—not to speak of his weeping, laughing, or talking to the image—were proof enough to them of derangement. Though they thought it unwise to have him in the temple, they could do nothing. So they sent a detailed report about these things to Mathur at Jaun Bazar. Mathur wrote in reply that he would come himself to investigate; meanwhile there was to be no interference with Sri Ramakrishna's mode of worship. The officials were convinced that as soon as Mathur saw the eccentricities of the young priest, he would dismiss him summarily. Soon after this Mathur paid an unexpected visit to the temple for he feared that some overzealous temple official might maltreat Sri Ramakrishna. He silently entered the Kali temple when Sri Ramakrishna was worshipping, and was struck with wonder at what he saw. Sri Ramakrishna was putting his whole soul into the worship with no idea that he was being observed. It did not take Mathur long to decide that Sri Ramakrishna's method of worship was the outcome of a genuine and profound love for the Divine Mother, the like of which is seldom encountered. Convinced that the object of building and maintaining the temple—the manifestation of the Mother Herself in the image there—was attained, he returned to his home and sent an order the next day to the temple superintendent that the young priest was to have freedom to worship in any way he chose, and that he was not to be molested.

Mention is made in the scriptures of two kinds of devotion. In one, man worships God in accordance with the injunctions laid down in the Shastras. He bathes so many times a day, observes fasts, uses this or that Mantra, waves lights in a certain fashion, and lays the greatest stress on the various disciplines prescribed by the scriptures. In the other kind of devotion one does not observe any such forms; one feels such intimacy with God, is so near to Him that one forgets all rules and regulations and acts according to the promptings of the heart. The first kind of devotion (Bhakti) is called Vaidhi-Bhakti, the second is known as Prema-Bhakti. The former is the stepping stone to the latter. One is blessed with Prema-Bhakti only when one's devotion to God is mature, the outcome of following the course laid down in the scriptures. It is thus apparent that the phenomenal changes in the mental outlook of Sri Ramakrishna which the ignorant ascribed to insanity, were due to the development of Prema-Bhakti. It was "the state of being blasted by an excess of Light." This transformation came in such a natural way that Sri Ramakrishna himself was scarcely conscious of it. He felt himself completely at the mercy of a tremendous force. He often wondered at his own conduct and questioned if he were on the right track. Hence we find him going to the Kali temple and weeping before the Mother, seeking Her advice. As we shall see, his trust in Her was never betrayed.

Owing to the great strain of God-realisation his body became subject to various ailments. One of these was a burning sensation over the entire body, as if his skin had been painted with a caustic. He described it thus later on: "At the time of worship I tried to think according to the directions of the Shastras that the sinner in me was burnt, and that I was pure and perfect. Who knew then that in every one tnere actually lies hidden a personification of evil that can be destroyed? I began to feel a burning sensation in my body from the beginning of my Sadhana period. What might this be?—I thought. Medicines were administered, but all proved futile. One day I was practising in the Panchavati grove, when a red-eyed man of a black colour came out of this body, reeling as if drunk and began to walk about in front of me. Shortly after, there emerged from my body another human figure of a placid mien, wearing the ochre robe and holding a trident in his hand. He attacked the former and killed him. A few days after that vision, I was relieved of the burning sensation which had tormented me for six months." As we shall see, he had two recurrences of this sensation later.

The scriptures dealing with devotion lay down five different methods of worship. The first is Shânta—the placid attitude of mind towards the Divinity cultivated by certain ascetics and anchorites who, having learned from the Vedas and other sources that God resides in the heart of every one, withdraw their senses from the objects of the world and concentrate their minds on Him as the only reality and the innermost Self of the universe. These sages live far from the turmoil of the world and lead a simple, retired life, eating roots or

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fruits. There is generally a tinge of Jnâna[1] in this form of worship. The Vedic Rishis are examples of this kind of devotion. The next way is called Dâsya or the relation of servant to master. Reflection on the complex scheme of the universe naturally leads to the conception of a Lord, with infinite power, knowledge, and mercy, governing in accordance with fixed laws. Many desirous of pleasing this God with loyal service, give up all considerations of personal comfort for His sake, thinking to establish thus the relationship of master and servant. The devotion of Hanumân, the monkey-god, for Sri Ramachandra is an example. He is regarded as the model of faithful service. The third way is by Sakhya or friendship. The devotee looks upon his Chosen Ideal as his dearest friend, feels no constraint in his presence, and is satisfied with simply making his friend happy. Arjuna and the cowherd boys of Vrindaban regarded Krishna thus. The fourth method is known as Vâtsalya or the relationship between parent and child. There is no element of awe in it, for the devotee looks upon the deity as his own child, and considers himself stronger than the object of his love. The parents of Sri Krishna are cases in point. Lastly, there is Madhura or the relationship which exists between two lovers. This is the most intense form of attachment, in which the least idea of separation is unbearable. The Gopis of Vrindaban are examples. God, in this form of Sadhana, is one's sweetheart, a part and parcel, as it were, of one's very being. It is higher than all the foregoing modes of worship and includes them all.

Sri Ramakrishna passed through all these phases of devotion, realising the same goal through every one.

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[1] Monism.

His Dasya Sadhana, which we shall describe in detail is particularly interesting in that through his endeavours to enact the role of Hanuman, he was blessed with the vision of Sitâ, the divine consort of Rama.

It was shortly after his vision of Kali that his attention was directed to Rama, the king of Ayodhyâ, who is regarded as an incarnation of the Lord Himself. Convinced that the quickest way to realise Him would be to become thoroughly imbued with the spirit of His greatest devotee, Hanuman, he took upon himself the task of reproducing as faithfully as possible Hanuman's attitude towards Rama—that of the faithful servant towards the master. The following are his own words about the process and results of this form of practice: "By constant meditation on the glorious character of Hanuman I totally forgot my own identity. My daily life and style of food came to resemble those of Hanuman. I did not feign them, they came naturally to me. I tied my cloth round the waist, letting a portion of it hang down in the form of a tail, and jumped from place to place instead of walking. I lived on fruits and roots only, and these I preferred to eat without peeling. I passed most of the time on trees, calling out in a solemn voice, 'Raghuvir!' My eyes looked restless like those of a monkey, and most wonderful of all, my coccyx enlarged by about an inch. It gradually resumed its former size after that phase of the mind had passed on the completion of that course of discipline. In short, everything about me was more like a monkey than a human being."

At the end of this Sadhana he had a wonderful vision, so exceedingly vivid and so different from any of his previous ones, that it remained long in his memory. Referring to it the Master said, "One day I was seated in the place now known as Panchavati in quite a normal state of mind—not at all entranced—when all of a sudden a luminous female figure of exquisite grace appeared before me. The place was illumined with her lustre. I perceived not her alone, but also the trees, the Ganges and everything. I observed that it was a human figure, being without such divine characteristics as three eyes and so on. But such a sublime countenance, expressive of love, sorrow, compassion, and fortitude, is not commonly met with even in goddesses. Slowly she advanced from the north towards me, looking graciously on me all the while. I was amazed and was wondering who she might be, when a monkey with a cry suddenly jumped and sat by her. Then the idea flashed within me that this must be Sita, whose whole life had been centred in Rama and who had misery only as her lot! In an excess of emotion I was about to fall at her feet crying, 'Mother,' when she entered into my body, with the significant remark that the smile on her lips she bequeathed unto me! I fell unconscious on the ground, overpowered with emotion. This was the first vision I had with eyes wide open, without meditation on anything. Is it because my first vision of Sita was of her grief-stricken aspect, that my subsequent life contained so much suffering? Who knows!"

The secret of his success in these diverse Sadhanas (it must be remembered that it takes the ordinary person many lives to achieve the goal of even one form of Sadhana) was—in one word—sincerity, a complete correspondence between thought and action—an entire absence of duplicity. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that for success in any pursuit one must live exactly up to one's ideal. As we proceed further we shall see how he carried it out in his own life.

In the foregoing pages we have narrated certain events in the life of Sri Ramakrishna which may seem impossible or supernatural, so difficult are they of explanation from the standpoint of reason or science. But they cannot be as lightly dismissed as that. All saints and sages, of every age and clime, claim to have had experiences inexplicable by reason, and up to the present at least, by science. At the same time none of them has said that his visions or extraordinary powers were beyond Nature or the reach of the rest of mankind—on the contrary, all have invited the rest of the world to test these experiences by experiment along the same lines, to demonstrate for themselves that they are as much within the realm of Nature as any of the phenomena of physical science. The only difference is in the degree of subtlety. Physical science deals with the comparatively gross manifestations of Nature, while religion—which is philosophy made practical—deals with its finer forms. If after patient and sincere research these transcendental experiences are found to be untrue, then alone have the right to reject them and the authority to pronounce them delusions been won. Here we would like to emphasise the fact that these visions are not in any way necessary for religious progress, nor are they the *sine qua non* of divine realisation. The highest spiritual experiences may and often do come unattended by them. At best, they are but milestones on the path of religious progress, of importance in proportion as they make a man purer, stronger, more loving, and more self-sacrificing. The right vision is that which transforms a fool into a sage; where contrary results are produced, we have only delusion.

We have seen that Rani Rasmani was attracted to Sri Ramakrishna. Convinced that he had been blessed with the vision of the Divine Mother, she felt that his strange behaviour bespoke the fulness of devotion, rather than any mental derangement. One day she came to Dakshineswar and after bathing in the Ganges entered the temple to worship and meditate. She took a seat near the Divine Mother. Sri Ramakrishna was there, and the Rani, according to her usual custom, requested him to sing. Sri Ramakrishna agreed and filled the place with the ecstasy of his songs. After a time, noticing that the Rani was inattentive, he exclaimed, "That anxiety even here!" and slapped her twice. The temple servants were confounded, but none dared to punish the offender. The only two people who were calm were Sri Ramakrishna and Rani Rasmani. His attitude was that of a father chastising an indiscreet child, while the Rani was abashed as if caught in some naughtiness. She was amazed to find that the young priest had the power to perceive that her mind was preoccupied with a pending lawsuit rather than with the songs of devotion. Realising the gravity of the situation, and apprehensive that the temple-staff might assume the right of punishing Sri Ramakrishna, she gravely forbade them to ever mention the incident to him.

Rasmani retired to her room. When her attendants complained of Sri Ramakrishna's insolence towards her, she answered, "You do not understand it; the Divine Mother Herself punished me and thus illumined my heart."

There is a great deal of significance in the above incident. It shows that Sri Ramakrishna considered himself only a tool in the hands of the Divine Mother. Had he had any other idea, he would not have dared to run the risk of jeopardising his position in the temple by insulting the Rani. It also throws a flood of light on the Rani's mentality allowing us to see the deep spiritual vein in her nature which made her recognise the justice of the rebuke and accept it cheerfully.

One day about this time Sri Ramakrishna in the presence of Mathur made Hriday his substitute saying that the Divine Mother would be as well pleased if thenceforth Hriday conducted the worship. Mathur took this to be as the will of the Mother and agreed to it cheerfully.

We have already mentioned the Panchavati,[1] the place where Sri Ramakrishna used to mediate. There was a small tank near by, which was soon after re-excavated, and the surplus earth was utilised in filling up the pits about this place. The Amalaka tree was sacrificed to this change. One day Sri Ramakrishna proposed to Hriday to build a suitable place for his spiritual practices. Hriday agreed and chose a spot near the Master's old place of Sadhana, where the latter himself planted an Ashwattha tree, and Hriday planted four others. Then a hedge of Tulasi and Aparâjitâ plants was started, which soon grew thick and tall enough to hide the place from the view of passers-by. One day some cattle destroyed the hedge and injured the young plants; this made Sri Ramakrishna anxious to protect it against further attacks. It is said that soon after a strong flood-tide in the Ganges brought to the bank near the temple a bundle of wooden posts, with rope, a bill-hook, and everything necessary for a fence.

We have already seen that Mathur always looked after Sri Ramakrishna's comfort and saw that no harm came to him from people who did not understand his mental state. But even he began to suspect that there might be some nervous trouble. The incident of his slapping Rani Rasmani strengthened this suspicion. So he arranged for Sri Ramakrishna's treatment by an expert physician, Kavirâj Gangâ Prasâd Sen, of Calcutta. The treatment, though continued for some time, brought no relief. Mathur also tried to persuade Sri Ramakrishna to keep his feelings within bounds and to regulate his life in accordance with fixed standards. One day he said, "God too must abide by his own laws. He has no power to transcend them." "What an absurd proposition!" replied Sri Ramakrishna, "One who has made a law can repeal it at pleasure or make a new law in its place." "How can that be?" said Mathur, "A plant that produces only red flowers cannot produce flowers of any other colour—white, for instance, for such is the law. I should like to see God produce white flowers from a plant bearing only red flowers." "That, too, He can easily do," answered Sri Ramakrishna, "for everything depends on His will." Mathur was not convinced. The next day, in the temple garden, Sri Ramakrishna came across a China-rose plant with two flowers on the same stalk, one of which was red and the other snow-white. He broke off the branch to show it to Mathur. As Mathur came in closer touch with Sri Ramakrishna, his doubts gave way to a growing conviction that here was a most remarkable man, a perfected sage, association with whom would confer untold blessings. He was coming under the magic spell of this strange man of realisation, and inwardly began to look up to him as a Guru. We shall presently see how this feeling of regard deepened into an absolute self-surrender at the feet of the humble priest of Dakshineswar. We shall conclude the account of this brilliant period in the life of Sri Ramakrishna by mentioning a few more incidents which happened during these four years (1855–1858) of his Sadhana.

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[1] It means a cluster of five sacred trees. Such a place is considered very holy and helpful to meditation. The five trees are Ashwattha, Bael, Amalaka, Ashoka, and Vata or the banyan.

Though Sri Ramakrishna during this period of divine madness could not bear association with worldly men, he did not shun the companionship of devotees. On the contrary, he was eager to be with them and join in their worship and Kirtana. Now and then he would go to Baranagore to visit the Dashamahâvidyâ, or to Kâlighât to worship the Divine Mother, and participated almost every year in the greatest religious festivity of Pânihâti, a few miles from Dakshineswar. It was in this latter place that Vaishnav Charan, son of Utsavânanda Goswâmi and a great Vaishnava devotee of the time, first met Sri Ramakrishna. It was in the year 1858. Sri Ramakrishna attended by Hriday had gone to witness the festival and was seated in the temple of Mani Mohan Sen, when Vaishnav Charan arrived and immediately recognised Sri Ramakrishna as a man of rare spirituality. After a little while he offered five rupees to Sri Ramakrishna, who refused to accept them. Vaishnav Charan being insistent Sri Ramakrishna told Hriday to accept the money and to buy mangoes and other things for offering with it. Then they all began to sing Kirtana, encircling Sri Ramakrishna, who fell into a trance. Vaishnav Charan tried to make Sri Ramakrishna eat of the offerings, but he could not swallow; the remainder was eaten by all as sacred Prasad. On the way back to Calcutta Vaishnav Charan, who had ascertained where Sri Ramakrishna lived, stopped at Dakshineswar to see him, but he was not there. A few years later, he met Sri Ramakrishna again, and, as we shall see, under exceedingly interesting circumstances.

At this time Sri Ramakrishna had to undergo an ordeal which Rani Rasmani and Mathur engineered rather thoughtlessly, although in good faith. They were greatly concerned at his failing health and thought that deviation from the rigid observance of continence might be beneficial. They knew that any such proposal would be rejected with scorn. So they contrived to tempt him secretly. Accordingly they hired two women of ill fame to enter the room at Dakshineswar and tempt this child of the Divine Mother. The moment he saw them, with all earnestness he sought shelter at the feet of the Mother. Hearing the name of Mother the women were abashed. Another day Mathur took Sri Ramakrishna for a drive to Calcutta and stopped at a house in Mechuâbâzâr, where several beautiful girls were waiting. He retired, leaving Sri Ramakrishna alone with them. Instantly Sri Ramakrishna became like a child, lost outward consciousness in repeating the name of Mother, and remained in that marvellous state—the very embodiment of purity and self-control. The effect of this on the minds of the girls was electric. They realised their folly, and afraid of the consequences of trying to tempt a saint, they implored his forgiveness. When Mathur, attracted by the noise, entered the room, he was struck dumb at this astonishing proof of Sri Ramakrishna's mastery over his passions, and as he hastened him from the scene, he met with a volley of reproaches from the infuriated agents of his design. He was smitten with shame, and, needless to say, his regard for Sri Ramakrishna was redoubled.

HALADHARI

At this time there came to Dakshineswar another man who was to be closely connected with the life of Sri Ramakrishna for a period of eight years. His name was Râmtârak, or more familiarly Haladhâri, who lived at Dakshineswar probably from 1858 to 1866. He was a cousin of Sri Ramakrishna, being the eldest son of Khudiram's youngest brother. He came to Dakshineswar in search of employment, and Mathur, knowing him to be related to Sri Ramakrishna, was glad to engage him in the worship of Mother Kali till his cousin recovered from his divine madness. Haladhari was well versed in the *Shrimad-Bhâgavata* and *Adhyâtma Râmâyana,* and was a master of the Gitâ and Vedanta. Though a devotee of Vishnu, he undertook, at the request of Mathur, to worship Kali. As he insisted on cooking his own food on the bank of the Ganges, Mathur remarked, "Why are you so particular? Sri Ramakrishna and your nephew Hriday do not object to taking the food offered to the Divine Mother." To this Haladhari replied, "My cousin has attained a certain state of realisation, and he can do so. But as I have not yet reached that state, in my case it would be a sin." Mathur was pleased at this straightforward answer and allowed him to do as he pleased.

Haladhari could not bear to see the animal sacrifice in the Kali temple. After nearly a month's service he was meditating one evening, when Kali appeared to him and told him to leave the temple, and that as a result of his half-hearted worship he would soon lose his son. Shortly afterwards, Haladhari's son died. After telling the entire circumstances to Sri Ramakrishna he took up the the service of Radha-Kanta instead.

Haladhari belonged to that degraded cult of the Vaishnavas which trying to practise the Madhura Bhava in its extreme form, does so not through meditation as it should, but through secret relations with women. The matter soon leaked out, and people began to whisper about it among themselves, though none dared to accuse him publicly lest he should curse them, and there was a current belief that his curse always came true. When, however, the news reached the ears of Sri Ramakrishna, he in his outspoken manner spoke to Haladhari of what was being said about him and his practices. This infuriated Haladhari, who said, "You are my cousin and younger, and yet you dare to slight me thus! As a punishment for this, blood will come out of your mouth." Though Sri Ramakrishna tried to appease him, saying that his object in warning him was to save him from criticism, Haladhari remained unmoved and did not retract his words.

Now that the Kali temple and its accommodations became known, many Sadhus used Dakshineswar as a halting place on their way to Gangâsâgar. It is probable that from some one of these Sri Ramakrishna learned the secrets of Hatha-Yoga, which he now practised. One evening soon after the above incident, he felt an irritating sensation in his palate, which after a minute began to bleed. Sri Ramakrishna described the incident: "The colour of the blood was dark like the juice of bean leaves. It was so thick that only a little portion fell to the ground and the rest clotted and hung like a rope from my teeth. I pressed one end of my cloth against the place to stop the bleeding, but without success. I was sorely perplexed. Many people gathered round me. Haladhari, too, came in all haste from his evening services. I told him weeping, 'See, cousin, what you have done to me by your curse.' Seeing me in such a plight he, too, began to weep. Fortunately, at that time there was staying in the Kali temple a Sadhu who, hearing of the incident, came and examined the colour of the blood and the place from which it came. He said, 'Thank God! There is no cause for anxiety. This hæmorrhage has done you great good. I see you were practising Yoga. This opened your Sushumnâ canal and a quantity of blood was rushing to the head. It is excellent that this blood, instead of reaching the brain, made a passage through the palate; or you would have entered the Jada Samadhi[1] from which you could never again come down to the plane of ordinary consciousness. It must be that the Divine Mother has some great mission to be done through you, and She has saved your body.' I was reassured by his words and was at peace."

Being an orthodox Brahmin, with great respect for the traditions of the Chatterjee family, Haladhari could not bring himself to justify the peculiar ways of Sri Ramakrishna. Though he lived with his cousin during the stormiest period of his Sadhana, yet, being book-bound, he grossly misunderstood his cousin's exalted spiritual state and naturally concluded, like other people, that his actions were more the outcome of a deranged brain than of any high spiritual realisation. Not having the breadth of vision which would enable him to look at things in their proper perspective, he would sometimes say to Hriday, "Look here, Hriday, it is really a blot on Ramakrishna's character that he has given up the sacred thread. Again, is it not awkward that he should remain naked before all? It is exceptionally good fortune to be born a Brahmin. Yet you see how Ramakrishna slights this rare privilege! I don't see that he has attained to such a high state of spiritual exaltation that he can afford to make light of the caste observances so recklessly. He does not take anybody's advice, excepting yours to a certain extent. You ought to see that his actions are more orthodox. In my opinion, you should use force even to prevent him from repeating these profanities."

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[1] Another name for Nirvikalpa Samadhi—the highest form of concentration mentioned in the Yoga-Shastra.

But at times his ideas about Sri Ramakrishna would change. If perchance he were present when the Master was in the sanctum of the Divine Mother, he would be struck at the sight of his cousin's unique devotion and earnestness and passionate prayers. Seeing this divine fervour—a thing of which he had had no experience in spite of his book-learning—Haladhari would revise his opinions and find an excuse for the inconsistencies. Then he would run to Hriday and say, "Ah, you must have seen something divine in Ramakrishna, otherwise how coud you serve him with such constancy?" Hriday—a somewhat changed man now—would answer with a smile, "Yes, you are right, uncle. Don't you see, I could not bring myself to serve others in such menial ways?"

So Haladhari was tossed between doubt and partial conviction regarding his cousin's state of mind. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Many a time Haladhari being struck by my devotion and zeal would say, 'Ramakrishna, this time I have found you out.' I would retort, 'Take care that you do not get confused again.' 'You cannot deceive me any more,' he would reply, 'surely the Lord is manifesting Himself through you.' I would smile and say, 'Let us hope so—we live and learn.' But while studying in leisure hours some such book as the *Bhagavata* or the *Adhyatma Ramayana* with the occasional stimulation of snuff, he would again be inflated with pride. Throwing all humility to the winds, he would assume an air of great superiority, look at the world as a mere mud-puddle, arrogate to himself the position of a great scholar, and thrust his opinions upon all. Sometimes I went to him and said, 'What you have read in the scriptures, I have realised in life. So I can understand the import of the Shastras.' Haladhari would flare up and reply in a swaggering tone, 'Go to, you are an egregious fool. That you should say that you understand these abstruse things!' I would reply, 'Believe me, the Divinity that you acknowledged to be residing in me teaches me everything.' At this Haladhari would become frantic with rage and reply, 'How foolish! What scripture teaches that God would incarnate Himself again in this Kali-Yuga except when He comes in the person of Kalki? You have verily become insane, or how could you entertain such thoughts?' I would remind him with a smile, 'Why, did you not say a few hours ago that there would be no further confusion in your mind about me?' But Haladhari would not be in the mood to listen to it then. We had many repetitions of this amusing scene. Then one day, as he saw me sitting naked on a branch of the banyan tree in the Panchavati, he was thoroughly convinced that I had been possessed by a Brahmadaitya[1]!"

Haladhari, we have said, was a Vaishnava, and ever since the death of his child through the curse of Kali he came to look upon that goddess as being of a Tâmasika or dire nature. One day he even remarked

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[1] A Brahmin earth-bound for some reason for a period after death.

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to Sri Ramakrishna, "Can one get spiritual elevation by worshipping a Tamasika form? Why do you bestow so much attention on the worship of Kali?" Sri Ramakrishna did not answer him then; but he was pained at the disrespect shown to his favourite Deity. He at once went to the Kali temple and asked the Divine Mother with tearful eyes, "Mother, Haladhari is a scholar, versed in the scriptures, and he says Thou art possessed of Tamasika attributes. Art Thou really so?" The Mother Herself enlightened him on the point. With a heart full of joy he ran to Haladhari who was engaged in the worship of Radha-Kanta. Excited, he at once climbed on his shoulders and exclaimed again and again: "Dare you call my Mother Tamasika! Is She? No. She is everything. She has all the three Gunas; again She is full of Sattva alone!" Sri Ramakrishna's divine touch illumined Haladhari's heart—the scales fell, as it were, from his eyes. In a moment he understood the folly of his remarks—realised his own littleness. He bowed his head in reverent submission, found in Sri Ramakrishna the manifestation of the Mother of the universe, and taking flowers and sandal-paste, made an offering at his holy feet. Shortly after, Hriday met him and asked how it was that he stooped to worship Sri Ramakrishna—specially as he believed him to be insane and possessed by an evil spirit. "Oh, I can't tell you how," replied Haladhari: "On returning from the Kali temple he overwhelmed me altogether. I forgot everything and saw in him the clear manifestation of divinity! Whenever I visit him in the Kali temple, he has that kind of influence over me. Really it is a mystery which I cannot solve." So in rare moments of illumination Haladhari saw divinity in his cousin, but he forgot this when he went back to his books.

Haladhari's conduct confirms the truth of the Master's statement that books are but "knots on the heart"—they stifle our cravings for God-realisation. The reader already knows that beggars used to be fed at the Kali temple. One day Sri Ramakrishna—like the true Vedantin that he was—ate a little of their leavings, considering these poor people as veritable representations of the Lord. When Haladhari saw him doing so, he, being an orthodox man, was upset and said, "What are you doing? You have lost caste. Now who will marry your daughters in future?" These incongruous words from the lips of a professed Vedantin like Haladhari roused the indignation of Sri Ramakrishna, who exclaimed, "You rogue! Do you not always quote from the scriptures to say that the world is an illusion and God is the only reality, and glibly recommend people to look upon all beings as Brahman? And you think that I like you would preach that the world is a myth and at the same time have children? Fie upon your knowledge of the scriptures."

One day Haladhari cast aspersions on the truth of Sri Ramakrishna's God-visions and said on the authority of the scriptures that God is beyond the reach of the human mind. That gave rise to grave doubts in the mind of Sri Ramakrishna. He thus described his feelings and the subsequent experience to one of his disciples, Swami Premananda: "I asked myself the question: Are the various divine visions which I have had and the words I have heard from the lips of the Mother Herself all false? Have they been mere fancies of my mind? Is it that I have been fooled by the Divine Mother? To me the very thought was painful and blasphemous. I was greatly perplexed. With sobs I prayed to the Mother: 'How couldst Thou have the heart to deceive me like that because I was a fool?' A stream of tears flowed from my eyes. Shortly after I saw something like a volume of mist rising from the floor and filling the space before me. In the midst of it appeared a fair face, calm and highly expressive, with a flowing beard. Fixing its steady gaze upon me the figure solemnly said, 'Well, remain on the threshold of relative consciousness!' Repeating this thrice the face gently disappeared in the mist, which also dissolved. This vision reassured me."

Another day such a doubt—and that, too, owing to the confusing arguments of Haladhari—crossed his mind. On that occasion, too, the Master, as he sat down to worship, begged of the Mother to dissolve it. She appeared before him in the form of a certain woman known as Rati's mother, beside the sacred jar used in worship and repeated the same words.[1] A third time he heard the same voice after he had come down from the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. But of this later.

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[1] The events described in this chapter were scattered over a period of eight years.

RETURN TO KAMARPUKUR AND MARRIAGE

Misfortunes seldom come singly. Chandra Devi had already experienced many. She had hardly recovered from the pangs of bereavement for her eldest son, when the news reached her at Kamarpukur that Gadadhar, her youngest and dearest son, had given up worship and all other duties in the Dakshineswar temple and was behaving to all intents and purposes like a madman. She heard that he shunned company and frequented lonely places, and that his every act bespoke insanity. Naturally the news made Chandra Devi as well as Rameshwar extremely anxious. They ascribed this malady to nervous prostration, symptoms of which, they thought, had been manifested during his boyhood and youth by his trances. Chandra again and again wrote to Dakshineswar asking Sri Ramakrishna to come to Kamarpukur, where under her maternal care and in the salubrious climate of the country his strained nerves might be soothed and his health regained. Sri Ramakrishna obeyed the call. The anxious mother found him restless, and indifferent to the affairs of the world, with a veil of sorrow and gloom overshadowing his once bright face. He was no longer attracted by anything agreeable; his former companions and friends were of no more interest to him; and the village of Kamarpukur, which once seemed so lovely and picturesque, appeared now dull and commonplace. His buoyancy had left him, and in its stead there was pain and anguish of mind—manifested in his weeping and the frequent calls for

"Mother." Poor Chandra was totally upset. She did not know the cause of this new illness, and all her attempts to console her dear son proved futile. In conjunction with medicine, various occult cures were tried; religious rites were performed to avert any probable disaster; and exorcists were consulted to pronounce on his case. Notwithstanding all these efforts, Sri Ramakrishna was at times overwhelmed with the same feelings as those of the Dakshineswar days when he was struggling to obtain a vision of the Divine Mother. The agonising burning sensations of Dakshineswar were repeated. Never before had the people of Kamarpukur marked in him such great zeal for God, such absence of fear, such indifference to everything worldly, such determination to surmount every obstacle that stood in the way of attaining his goal.

Chandra Devi in her anxiety consulted an expert exorcist. The Master told of this later: "One day an exorcist came and gave me some charmed water to smell, saying that if I were under the influence of an evil spirit, it would instantly leave me. But the experiment was a sad failure. Then with the help of some specialists a spirit was invoked. It said to the exorcists present that I was neither under the influence of any spirit, nor had I been suffering from any illness. Then it warned me against using too much betel-nut, since I wanted to be a Sadhu. Really I was very fond of it, but I gave it up after this admonition."

We have already said that there are two cremation grounds at Kamarpukur. These are generally shunned by the villagers even at day-time as haunted places. Consequently they are very lonely and as such exceedingly fit for spiritual exercises. Being places where the last vestige of the human body is dropped, not only do they always remind one of the evanescence of this world and all its enjoyments, but at the same time automatically turn one's mind to thoughts of God and the other world. Hence cremation grounds have in India always been invested with a sort of unique holiness, and they are often selected as places for meditation, specially by the Tantrika Sadhakas. It is the favourite abode of Kali, the all-destroying Mother of the universe, and devotees believe that by practising in such sacred places they will reach their cherished goal the sooner.

Sri Ramakrishna intended to practise stern Tapasya and chose one of those places for this purpose. He began to spend whole days and a great part of every night there in worship and meditation. Gradually his relatives and neighbours came to know of this and of his many extraordinary visions while meditating there. The anxious mother often sent Rameshwar to call him back. Rameshwar dared not approach the place and called him from a distance.

A few months' stay at Kamarpukur did Sri Ramakrishna much good, and he recovered his normal state of mind. His restlessness subsided, and he ceased to weep. It is not difficult to divine the cause of this, for from his own utterances and from the testimony of his relatives we can infer that, as a result of his strenuous Sadhana, he must have had visions of the Divine Mother again.

His mother and relatives were greatly relieved. Of course he had certain peculiarities yet, such as passing much time in the cremation ground, sitting naked while worshipping or meditating, manifesting annoyance if disturbed at devotions, and showing a particular fondness for spiritual pursuits; but these had been characteristic of him.

Sri Ramakrishna was now twenty-three years of age, and he was as indifferent as ever to all worldly concerns. His mother and brother began ot plan to interest him in domestic affairs. Their first thought was, naturally, of marriage—a tie which he could not disregard. Once married, his mind would not soar so high, and the responsibility of maintaining a family would soon, they thought, steady him. So they began to search for a bride, and blamed themselves for not having thought earlier of this solution for their troubles.

Messengers were sent to the neighbouring villages in search of a bride, but with no success. According to the prevalent custom of society, it was impossible for them to secure a girl of the type they desired, without a proper dowry; and they were too poor for that. The search was vigorously continued, but with no better result. This threw Chandra Devi and Rameshwar into despair. Gadadhar had purposely been kept in the dark about these negotiations lest he should take them amiss. But he was too clever for them. He was not long in discovering the whole plot; but far from thwarting it, he seemed to welcome the idea. He made merry as boys do at the prospect of some happy incident in the family. Was it because he already knew that such was the Divine Mother's dispensation, or was it in mere spirit of fun? Though the average person may take the latter view, we have weighty reasons to believe that the former hypothesis alone was true.

Sri Ramakrishna found his mother and brother in a dejected state, and inquiring into the matter learned that their failure to get a bride for him was the cause of their worry. At this he said in a semi-conscious mood, "It is useless to try here and there. Go to Jayrâmbâti,[1] and there you will find the bride providentially reserved[1] for me in the house of Râm Chandra Mukhopâdhyâya." Though his mother and brother did not attach much importance to this statement, they sent a man to that village, who returned with the report that it was true that Ram Chandra had a girl, but though she might otherwise be a good match for Sri Ramakrishna, she was too young, being only five years old. But Chandra agreed to accept the girl as no other bride was available. Everything was settled in a few days, an auspicious day was fixed for the ceremony, and Sri Ramakrishna was married to the girl,[2] whose name was Sâradâmani Devi. Rameshwar had to pay a dowry of three hundred rupees.

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[1] A village three miles to the north-west of Kamarpukur.

After the ceremony was over Chandra Devi was greatly comforted. She firmly believed that the marriage would be good for Sri Ramakrishna; and she was glad that her "mad" son had gone through the ceremony cheerfully. But her happiness was marred a little by a trifling incident. Being poor, she had borrowed some ornaments from her friends in the Laha family and with them bedecked the bride on the night of the marriage. When, a few days later, the time came for returning those ornaments, she had not the heart to take them from the unsuspecting girl. She was thinking over the matter, when Sri Ramakrishna said he would look to it. When the young wife was asleep, he took those ornaments from her so cleverly that she did not know it. The ornaments were sent back to the Laha family. The girl on awakening complained that her ornaments were missing. Chandra Devi took her in arms and comforted her with tearful eyes saying, "My darling, Gadadhar will give you better ornaments hereafter." The girl's uncle who had come to see her that day was much displeased at this incident and took her home at once. All this pained Chandra Devi very much; but Sri Ramakrishna said jokingly, "Whatever they may say or do now, they cannot annul the marriage any way!"

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[1] The expression he used was characteristic. He said, "Marked as it were with a straw." The reference is to the custom among rural people of reserving the best fruit for offering unto the Lord. To distinguish it, they tie a piece of straw round it.

[2] Of course, it is understood that this was really a betrothal ceremony.

After his marriage Sri Ramakrishna stayed at Kamarpukur for about a year and a half. Chandra Devi would not allow him to leave her until he was completely cured, for she feared that he might have a relapse. Once during this period he went to his father-in-law's house and after a few day's stay there brought his bride home. He was becoming anxious to return to Dakshineswar to resume his work there. The poverty at home must have urged him to do so. Taking leave of his mother and brother he set out for Dakshineswar.

BACK TO DAKSHINESWAR

On his return to Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna again took charge of the worship of the Divine Mother, but after a few days he was seized anew with the madness of God-realisation. The aged mother, the struggling brother, the young wife, the pecuniary condition of the family, all were forgotten in this desire for the vision of the Divine Mother. The same meditation and prayer day and night, the same flushing of the chest, the same painful, burning sensation all over the body, the same repugnance to worldly matters, and the same insomnia reappeared. But having experienced them once, he was not worried by them now.

Mathur and others became anxious, thinking that he had a relapse, and placed him again under the treatment of Kaviraj Ganga Prasad Sen, but as before with no results. Hriday took him regularly to the Kaviraj. One day another physician[1] of East Bengal was present when Sri Ramakrishna came. When he heard the particulars of the case he said, "It appears from the symptoms that this is a case of divine madness, the after-effect of some Yogic practices, and medicines will be of no use." Sri Ramakrishna himself said later on that this was the first physician to diagnose the true nature of his case. But nobody attached any importance to this statement at the time. Mathur and others went on trying new methods of treatment for Sri Ramakrishna in spite of which the symptoms were gradually aggravating.

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[1] Some say that it was Durgâ Prasâd Sen, brother of Ganga Prasad.

The news of his illness slowly filtered to Kamarpukur. The anguish of Chandra Devi can better be imagined than described. Finding no other way, she resolved to invoke the blessings of God through personal austerities. The Lord Shiva of Kamarpukur was famed for fulfilling the desires of His devotees. Chandra Devi repaired to His temple, determined to remain there without food and water until the gracious Lord granted her prayer. In a vision she was directed to approach the Shiva of Mukundapur, who would answer her prayer. Chandra faithfully obeyed the injunction. She had starved and prayed for a couple of days, when the great God appeared to her in a dream and said, "Do not be afraid, your son is not mad. He is simply passing through a state of God-realisation." The anxious mother was consoled and thanking the Lord returned home.

It was a momentous period in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. He was athirst day and night for the Divine Mother. "O Mother, have pity on me, reveal Thyself to Thy unworthy son. I do not want comfort, nor do I hanker after wealth or prestige. I only want Thee and Thee alone"—was his constant cry.

Referring to this state, Sri Ramakrishna often said afterwards, "No sooner was one state transcended than another took its place. Before that whirlwind, the sacred thread was blown away. Not only that, even the wearing cloth hardly remained. Sometimes I would open my mouth—the jaws touching as it were the heavens and the nether worlds—and earnestly cry, 'Mother!'—thinking I must pull Her like a fisherman hauling fish with a drag-net. Oh, through what states of mind I passed in those days! Everyone thought I was mad. A slight stimulus from outside stirred the depths of my spiritual consciousness. Even a street girl appeared to me as Sita, going to greet her victorious husband. One day I saw an English lad standing cross-legged against a tree. Immediately the thought of Krishna was suggested to my mind, and I went into deep meditation. At one time I would roam in the temple premises with a bamboo on my shoulder. At another time I would feed a dog and eat the leavings. The idea of caste lost all meaning for me. A low-caste man sent me a curry cooked by his wife, which I ate with relish. In the Panchavati I would sit in deep meditation with my body perfectly still—losing all consciousness of the outside world. At that time, for want of proper care, my hair was matted. Birds would perch on my head and peck the grains of rice left there during the time of worship. Often snakes would crawl over my motionless body—and neither I nor the snakes knew it. Oh, what visions flitted past my eyes, day and night!"

About his wonderful experiences of this period he said, "As I sat down to mediate, I would find a Sannyasin emerging from my body with a trident in hand and directing me to concentrate my mind on God, leaving aside all other thoughts. He threatened to plunge his weapon into my body if I did not do so. When the Pâpa-Purusha (the personification of sin) came out of my body, it was the same Sannyâsin who killed him. When I wished to see some deities in distant places or participate in religious chantings held far off, I would see this shining figure step out of my body, go along a luminous path to those places, and re-enter my body after fulfilling the particular desires."

On another occasion he said, "A young Sannyasin exactly resembling me would come out of my body and instruct me in all matters. At those times I might retain a little outward consciousness, but more often I lost it completely in my absorption in watching the movements of this strange person. When he re-entered this body, I recovered my normal state.

"The ordinary man could not have borne a fraction of that tremendous fervour, his body would have shattered by a quarter of that emotion. I could forget my indescribable pangs only by seeing the Mother in some form or other for the greater part of the day and night. Otherwise this body could not have survived. For six years these eyes remained wide open, not a wink of sleep visited them. I could not close the eyelids, however much I might try to do so. I had no idea of time, nor of the body. When the mind, at rare intervals, came down to a lower plane and I had a faint idea of the body, a shudder of pain would pass through me at the thought that I was going mad. Standing before a mirror I would put my finger into my eyes to see if the eyelids would close, but they would not. Horrified, I would often burst into tears and pray, 'Mother, is this the result of praying and wholly surrendering myself unto Thee? Ah! Thou hast visited me with a fell disease !' But the next moment I would say, 'Let it be as Thou wishest. Let this body go to pieces, but leave me not. Reveal Thyself to me, be kind to Thy helpless son, O Mother, I have taken shelter at Thy lotus feet. Thou art my only refuge.' As I prayed thus, my mind would again be stimulated, this body would seem a trifle, not worth thinking about, and the blissful Mother would appear before me and console me with Her gracious words."

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when in the course of spiritual practice the aspirant's mind becomes sufficiently purified, it acts as the Guru. In the light of this statement we can understand to a certain extent the meaning of his extraordinary vision about the "double" coming out of his body. It betokened a high degree of concentration, where the contents of the mind took a concrete form and lived and moved like an embodied being.

One of his Sadhanas of this interesting period consisted in banishing from his mind all attachment to wealth. Sitting on the bank of the Ganges, he took some earth in one hand and a few rupees in the other, weighing their value mentally as he passed them from hand to hand. Money, he said to himself, can at best give only a comfortable living and some facilities for charity—that is all. It cannot give realisation of God, which is the only thing worth having in life. Hence it has no more real value than this handful of earth. Firmly impressing this idea on his mind, he finally consigned both to the Ganges. Again, for the complete effacement of a sense of superiority from his mind, he washed unclean places like an ordinary sweeper, viewing alike all objects of the world as but modifications of matter. Following out this idea he taught his mind to regard sandal-paste and filth as the same, and he would touch them both with equal indifference.

Mathur's regard for Sri Ramakrishna was deepening day by day. He was ever careful about his comforts, as the following incident will show. One day Sri Ramakrishna entered one of the Shiva temples at Dakshineswar and began to recite the *Mahimnah-Stotra*, a beautiful hymn in praise of Shiva. Soon he was overpowered with emotion at the thought of His great glory and forgot the world. Coming to a particularly beautiful stanza in which the glories of the Lord are declared as altogether indescribable, his feeling rose to a climax, and he was brought face to face, as it were, with the great God. He no longer remembered the order of the lines or the stanzas composing the hymn, and even forgot its language. "O Lord, how can I describe Thy infinite glory?"—were the only words that came from his lips. Tears began to flow profusely from his eyes. His strange conduct caused people to gather around him, though he was not conscious of them. Mathur, who happened to be present at Dakshineswar, hurried to the spot. He stood by, mutely watching the spectacle. An officious employee suggested that this "mad" man be removed from the proximity of the Deity, whereupon Mathur said that any one touching Sri Ramakrishna would do so at his peril. This silenced the men present. After a long time Sri Ramakrishna gradually recovered normal consciousness. He was astonished to see so many people looking at him. Seeing Mathur, he asked him in a childlike way if he had done anything wrong in a state of unconsciousness. "Oh no," replied Mathur, "you were only reciting a hymn, and I stood here to see that nobody disturbed you."

Some time after this, a remarkable incident happened which grealty increased Mathur's regard for Sri Ramakrishna. One day, in the long verandah on the east side of his room, the latter was pacing to and fro, absorbed in deep thought. Mathur was seated alone in his room, whence he could have a good view of the Master. For a long time he watched, the latter not being at all conscious that he was being observed. Suddenly an unexpected thing happened. Mathur ran to him, prostrated himself and began to weep like a child at his feet. Sri Ramakrishna was taken aback and said, "What is this? You are the son-in-law of Rani Rasmani. What will people think if they see you behave like this? Be calm and get up." But Mathur still wept. When he regained his composure a little, he explained the reason for his emotions: "I watched you as you were pacing in the verandah. When you went one way, I saw you in the form of the Blissful Mother; when you turned in the opposite direction, you took on the form of the Lord Shiva! At first I thought it was hallucination. I rubbed my eyes and looked again; but to my astonishment every time I saw the same phenomenon." As he spoke, Mathur wept, so overwhelmed was he with emotion. "But I know nothing of it," reiterated the Master in his characteristic way. Referring to this incident he said later on, "Mathur would not be comforted at the time. I felt nervous lest Rani Rasmani should learn of it and think I had hypnotised him." Then he would add, "Was it for nothing that Mathur respected and looked so much after the comforts of this body (meaning himself)? Mother showed him many wonderful things time and again. It was written in his horoscope that his Ishta (Chosen Deity) would be always gracious unto him, nay, would move in flesh and blood with him."

After this, Mathur's regard and devotion increased a thousandfold. Henceforth he counted it as a rare privilege to be of the least service to the Master, and always complied with his wishes. And we shall see later on how he was intimately associated with a great part of the Master's subsequent Sadhanas.

We now come to a noteworthy event in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. It was the death of Rani Rasmani, which took place on the 19th of February, 1861. Before passing away she had the satisfaction of seeing two of her great desires fulfilled, namely, the consecration of the temple at Dakshineswar and a permanent arrangement for its future efficient management. The part she had to play in the divine drama of which Sri Ramakrishna was the hero, was done, and the time was come for her exit. She fell ill with fever and stomach trouble, which developed into a chronic dysentery of a serious type. It is said that her last days were embittered by the refusal of her eldest daughter, Padmamani Dâsi, to sign the document waiving her claims to the property of the Kali temple. A few days before her death Rani Rasmani was taken to her house at Kalighat on the bank of the sacred Âdigangâ. Shortly before her death she was brought to the Ganges. Seeing some lamps lighted before her, she exclaimed, "Remove those lights. How tame they look now! Ah, my Mother is coming—the halo of Her form has illumined the whole place." After a slight pause she said, "Mother, art Thou come? Well, Padma refused to sign, will that do any harm, Mother?" Uttering these words she passed away quietly, and her soul, leaving behind the fret and fever of this world, soared high into Divine Realms.

On the death of Rani Rasmani, Mathur became the sole executor of the estate. He sought to place himself unreservedly at the disposal of the Master and since his great vision, it was his one desire to live always near him. Not only would he arrange the trips which Sri Ramakrishna desired to make, but would often, as in the case of his visit to the Panihati Fair, go himself in disguise, with a few attendants, to look after him.

On the eve of his embarking on a varied course of Sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna felt the necessity of support from some one who could supply him with the requisites for those practices. He even prayed to the Mother for such a one. Later on, the Master spoke of Mathur as the first of the five supporters, engaged for him by the Divine Mother. Whenever any desire arose in his mind, he would speak of it to Mathur, who was only too glad to fulfil it at once. At the same time, Sri Ramakrishna was very kind to Mathur. Yet on questions of vital importance, where some principle was at stake, he never yielded to the latter or hesitated to say what he deemed to be the right thing. His treatment of Mathur was characterised by a spirit of independence as well as of simplicity. It never occurred to him to try to curry favour, for he knew that the Omniscient Mother would in time fulfil his desires. One day some ornaments were stolen from the images of the Deities in the Radhakanta temple. Mathur heard of it and in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna apostrophised the gods, "Ah, you were powerless to protect your own ornaments from the thief!" This at once elicited a rebuke from the Master, who said, "What nonsense you speak! God cares very little for these clods of earth which you call jewels. They are precious to you, not to Him, for is not Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, His servant-maid?"

Mathur one day proposed to Sri Ramakrishna that he would set apart a large estate in his name. At this Sri Ramakrishna thundered, "What! Do you intend to make me a worldly man!" Mathur often invited him to his residence at Jaun Bazar and spent many delightful days with him there. In the evenings he would take him out for a drive. He brought costly utensils of gold and silver for the use of the Master and many costly robes. But Sri Ramakrishna remained the same child of the Divine Mother, perfectly unattached. One day a very expensive shawl was purchased for him. He took it cheerfully and like a boy showed it to others. But his discriminating mind soon began to argue, "What is there in it? Nothing but goat's wool. Like every other thing it is also a modification of matter. It protects one from cold no doubt, but this can be done as well by a blanket or quilt. And like other material things it does not help one to realise God. Rather it makes its owner assume an air of superiority. He thinks himself rich and is proud. So it takes a man away from God." As he was weighing thus in his mind the evils which the shawl was likely to produce, he threw the beautiful shawl on the ground and began to trample and spit on it. Not content with this, he was about to burn it, when some one rescued it. On hearing of the incident Mathur said with a smile that it was well done.

Mathur had a family priest in the Kalighat temple, named Chandra Hâldâr. For some days he had been noticing Mathur's devotion to Sri Ramakrishna. Wishing to monopolise the rich man's favour, he was alarmed to find a competitor in the field. He determined to put a stop to it. One day Sri Ramakrishna lay in an outer room of Mathur's Jaun Bazar house in a half-conscious state, when the priest suddenly came in. There was no one near by. The man pushed the Master several times and said, "Well, tell me how you hypnotised Mathur Babu." Sri Ramakrishna kept silent, for he had not the power to speak then. The priest getting no answer to his repeated queries was exasperated and kicked the Master thrice before he went away. Sri Ramakrishna knew what the consequences would be if the matter were reported to Mathur. So he kept it to himself.

Thus Mathur was impressed with Sri Ramakrishna's invulnerable purity and simplicity in all circumstances and found him to be absolutely proof against lust and wealth.

BHAIRAVI BRAHMANI

One morning Sri Ramakrishna was plucking flowers in the garden of Dakshineswar, when he saw a country-boat coming towards the smaller bathing ghat of the temple. A woman with a small bundle in her hand stepped out of the boat. Middle-aged, beautiful, and with long dishevelled hair, she appeared from her ochre-coloured robes to be a Sannyasini. All her belongings consisted of a few books and one or two pieces of cloth. Though nearly forty years of age, she looked much younger. Sri Ramakrishna must have been attracted to her at the very first sight, for soon as he espied her, he went to his own room. Calling Hriday he gave him a description of the woman and asked him to bring her from the Chândni[1] to his presence. "She is a stranger. Why should she come even if invited?" replied Hriday, rather surprised, for he had never before seen his uncle eager to speak to any strange woman. "Go and tell her about me, and she will come"—that was all he said.

Without another word Hriday went to the Chandni, where he found the nun or Bhairavi, as she was called, seated. He gave her his uncle's message. The Bhairavi at once complied with his request, which again surprised Hriday.

As soon as the Bhairavi met Sri Ramakrishna, she burst into tears of joy and surprise and said in a tender voice, "My son, you are here! Knowing that you were somewhere on the banks of the Ganges, I have been searching for you so long, and now I have found you."

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[1] The roofed court which is the main entrance to the temple compound.

"How could you know about me, mother?" asked Sri Ramakrishna.

She replied, "Through the grace of the Divine Mother I had come to know that I was to meet three of you. Two I have already met in East Bengal, and today I find you."

She spoke with emotion, as though she had found her long-lost treasure at last. Sri Ramakrishna, too, was visibly moved.

After a while, she spoke of herself. Born of a Brâhmin family in the District of Jessore (Bengal), she had come to know through Yoga power that there were three great personages in Bengal to all of whom she was to deliver a certain message. The two she had already met were named Chandra and Girijâ, both from the District of Barisâl. Sri Ramakrishna sat close by her, and like a boy opening his heart to his mother, related to her every incident of his Sadhana—his wonderful visions, his total loss of outward consciousness in the meditation of God, the burning sensation all over the body, his sleeplessness and other symptoms. He further said that people looked upon him as insane, because his actions differed so widely from those of the common run of men. He asked repeatedly, "Can you tell me what these symptoms are? Am I really mad? And is this the result of my praying day and night to the Mother?" The Sannyasini listened to his recital with feelings of joy and wonder. Full of motherly tenderness, she again and again consoled him, "Who calls you mad, my son? This is not insanity. Your state is what is called Mahâbhâva[1] in the Shastras. It

[1] An extraordinary state of religious ecstasy mentioned in

is because people do not understand this blessed state of yours that they call you mad. Sri Radha experienced this state and so did Sri Gauranga. All these are recorded in the Bhakti texts. I have these books with me, and I shall show you that whoever has sincerely yearned for God has experienced this state, and everyone doing so must pass through it." These words reassured Sri Ramakrishna.

Finding that the day had already advanced, Sri Ramakrishna gave her some Prasad from the Kali temple, and knowing that, with her maternal attitude towards him, she would not take it unless he partook of it first, ate some. She went around the temples, took the Prasad, and later came to the Panchavati with doles of raw foodstuffs to cook and offer to her Chosen Deity, Raghuvir, a stone emblem of whom she always kept with her.

The cooking over, she placed the food before Raghuvir and closed her eyes in meditation while offering it. Soon she had a divine vision, and sunk in deep meditation, she became totally unconscious of the world. Tears of joy trickled down her cheeks. In the mean time Sri Ramakrishna had felt a strong urge to come to the Panchavati and appeared there in a semiconscious mood. He advanced to the place where the Bhairavi sat absorbed in meditation. Like a sleeping man, he unconsciously began to take the food offered to Raghuvir. Soon after she opened her eyes, and a thrill of rapture passed through her as she saw Sri Ramakrishna taking her offerings, for there was a curious similarity between her vision and the scene that was being enacted before her. Yet she could hardly

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books of Bhakti, attended with nineteen external characteristics such as shedding of tears, tremor of body, standing of hair on end, perspiration, etc.

believe her eyes. Sri Ramakrishna, when he recovered his normal state of mind, felt abashed for what he had done. He apologised saying, "Really I do not know why I do this kind of thing in a state of unconsciousness." She consoled him with the words, "You have done well, my son. It is not really you, but He who is within you that has done this, as He always does. In my meditation I clearly realised who did it and why. I have come to understand that there is no further need for my formal worship, which has borne fruit at length." Then without the slightest hesitation she took the remnants of the food as sacred Prasad, and later on she consigned to the Ganges the emblem she had so long devoutly worshipped, for she had found her beloved Deity in the person of Sri Ramakrishna!

"Mother, I shall learn if Thou alone teachest me," this prayer of Sri Ramakrishna to the Mother of the universe was fulfilled by his meeting with the Sannyasini or "Brâhmani" as he used to designate her—who came at the psychological moment when he needed confirmation from the scriptures for his various realisations, ridiculed as vagaries of a diseased brain. To Sri Ramakrishna this was an additional proof that the Divine Mother was guiding him.

The relation of mother and son which sprang up between them from their very first meeting deepened as they became better acquainted. The Brahmani took up her residence in the Dakshineswar temple. Both passed a great part of the day in the Panchavati, in religious conversation. The Brahmani had dived deep into the various Hindu scriptures, specially the Tantras and the Vaishnava literature. Besides, she had long practised religious exercises, which gave a great practical value to her book knowledge. The Master's questions as to his various experiences she would settle by quoting from authoritative texts wherein are recorded similar experiences of previous seekers after truth. All this had a reassuring effect upon Sri Ramakrishna's mind.

Scarcely a week had passed when it struck Sri Ramakrishna that people might misunderstand his close association with the Brahmani. One day he threw out a hint to her to the effect. She agreed with him and decided to put up somewhere in the village whence she could come and go every day. She fixed her abode on Devamandal's Ghat at Âriâdaha, a couple of miles north of the Dakshineswar temple. There was no difficulty about her food and requirements, for she soon won over the village people by her amiable personality. She used to go to see Sri Ramakrishna daily. The Brahmani, who was a Vaishnava devotee of a high order, was soon overpowered with Vâtsalya Bhâva (motherly attitude) towards Sri Ramakrishna. She loved to feed him with various sweets and milk preparations, as Yashodâ did her son, Sri Krishna. In her room she would often wait with cream and butter in her hand and cry "Gopala" in an excess of feeling, while tears fell from her eyes. At that moment Sri Ramakrishna would feel a strong urge to see her, and like a boy pining for his mother, he would run to her. Then he would sit by her and take the cream and butter. Or again, the Brahmani would put on a silk cloth and various ornaments—which she procured for this purpose—and in company of other women of the locality lead a procession to Dakshineswar, singing songs descriptive of Yashoda's love for her boy, and with the sweets she brought she would feed Sri Ramakrishna. These touching scenes, with the holy associations they evoked, made a profound impression on the hearts of the spectators, and Krishna's mother would be recalled to their minds.

Judging from what Sri Ramakrishna had told her, the Brahmani concluded that his extraordinary experiences were the result of his extreme love of God. Every day she saw him go into trance as they talked on spiritual matters. From his loss of outward consciousness in meditation, his ecstasy during Sankirtanas, and various other traits of his character, she was convinced that he had scaled the ultimate heights of spiritual realisation. She had read in the *Chaitanya-Charitâmrita*, the *Chaitanya-Bhâgavata*, and other books treating of Sri Gauranga's life, that the Lord would incarnate Himself again to redeem the people from their misery and ignorance. This idea came to her mind when she found such a strange analogy between the life of Sri Chaitanya and that of Sri Ramakrishna. Both were mad after God; both developed the same extraordinary symptoms, including the power of transmitting spiritual fervour to others by touching them while in a state of ecstasy. These and many other incidents common to these two lives indicated to the Brahmani that the Lord was incarnated again in the person of Sri Ramakrishna.

Another incident happening at this time confirmed the belief of the Brahmani. We have already referred to the burning sensation from which Sri Ramakrishna suffered. This trouble reappeared during his second period of divine madness, that is, shortly after the Brahmani's advent, and continued with more or less intensity. All the efforts of physicians failed to alleviate it. The pain began with sunrise and increased as the day advanced. At noon it was so intolerable that Sri Ramakrishna had to plunge into the Ganges and cover his head with a napkin. Three or four hours every day were spent this way. Fearing that too long immersion might lead to other troubles, he would come out of the water and lie on the marble floor, after cooling it by rubbing with a wet cloth. Though experts and laymen all ascribed this malady to some internal disorder, the Brahmani found another cause for it. She diagnosed it as the effect of his strong yearning for God. She added on the evidence of scriptures that this symptom had been manifested in Sri Radha and, in recent history, in Sri Gauranga Deva, when a tempest of divine emotion had blown over their minds. On scriptural authority, again, she prescribed a curious remedy for it. The patient had only to wear a garland of fragrant flowers and paint his body with sandal-paste. Of course everybody ridiculed the idea as being preposterous. But Mathur thought that there was no harm in trying it; accordingly it was done. Great was the astonishment when Sri Ramakrishna completely recovered under the treatment in three days. Many would not give credit to the Brahmani's treatment and called it an accident. The incident was a further help to the Brahmani in identifying the soul that dwelt in Sri Ramakrishna's body. And when she heard of Sri Ramakrishna's vision of two boys coming out of his body on the way to Sihore, it made her assurance doubly sure. She concluded and told Sri Ramakrishna that this time Sri Chaitanya had appeared in the frame of his comrade Nityânanda.

A few days after, another symptom, of a different kind but no less troublesome, made its appearance. Sri Ramakrishna himself described it thus: "I was seized with a ravenous appetite which no amount of food could satisfy. No sooner had I taken something than I again felt hungry. Day and night one thought alone possessed my mind, and that was what to eat. 'What may this new disease be,' I anxiously thought. When I consulted the Brahmani, she replied, 'My son, don't worry. Those who advance on the path of spirituality pass through such abnormal states. Wait, I shall cure it.' She asked Mathur to store in a room a large quantity of edibles of all sorts. When it was done she told me to remain in that room day and night and eat whenever and whatever I liked. I did so—moving about and taking every now and then a bit of something or other according to fancy. After three days I was cured."

This sort of appetite has been recorded in the lives of other aspirants. Sri Ramakrishna experienced this abnormal craving for food several times in his life.

These successful experiments, the strange coincidence of the various realisations of Sri Ramakrishna with the recorded evidence of the scriptures, and the wonderful experience she had on the very first day of her meeting, left no doubt whatsoever in the mind of the Brahmani as to the truth of her bold hypothesis about the Master's real personality. Now she openly asserted that Sri Ramakrishna was not an ordinary devotee, nor even a superman with lofty spiritual realisation, but that he was an Incarnation of God born into this world for some inscrutable purpose. When she was convinced that her conclusions were correct, she began to speak of them freely not only to Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday, but to many others.

One day Sri Ramakrishna was seated with Hriday and Mathur in the Panchavati, when he casually remarked to the latter, "You see, a Brahmin lady has come here. She calls me an Incarnation of God." "How can that be," replied Mathur, "since the scriptures mention only ten Incarnations, and there is no room for an eleventh one? But I admit you have obtained the grace of the Mother Kali."

"She says, she finds the distinguishing marks of an Incarnation on my body and in my mind," said the Master: "She is well versed in the scriptures, and she has also a lot of books with her."

They were talking thus, when they saw the Brahmani approaching with a plate of sweetmeats. Mathur asked the Master if she were the one of whom he had been speaking. Sri Ramakrishna nodded in reply. Mathur found her in a half-abstracted mood—as Yashoda used to be when feeding her darling. As she drew near, she saw Mathur and, controlling her emotions with some effort, gave the plate to Hriday. Pointing to Mathur the Master said to the Brahmani, "I was just telling him of what you say about me. But he says that the scriptures mention only ten Incarnations and no more." Mathur bowed to her and awaited an answer. "Why," she quickly replied, "the *Bhagavata* actually records twenty-two and then makes room for an infinite number of them. Besides, it is clearly mentioned in the Vaishnava scriptures that Sri Gauranga would be incarnated again, and there is a striking resemblance in many points between him and Sri Ramakrishna." She added that a Vaishnava scholar would settle the point, and that she was prepared to prove her case. Mathur remained silent.

The Brahmani's bold declaration made a profound impression in the Kali temple. The man who had hitherto been looked upon as a lunatic was emphatically declared to be an Incarnation of God, and the scriptures supported this contention! The very man who had been ridiculed and slighted by everybody, was being ranked with Sri Krishna, Ramachandra, or Buddha! He became the burning topic of the hour. Mathur was puzzled. Torn between faith and doubt, he found himself in a dilemma. From his own experiences with Sri Ramakrishna during the past few years he had to admit that he possessed many superhuman traits. But he was not ready to think of him as God Himself. So the momentous declaration of the Brahmani raised a storm in his mind. Besides her disinterestedness, which was in her favour, the Brahmani was ready to verify her statement by scriptural authority. She had sent out a challenge. She was prepared to meet any scholar to prove her contention. Sri Ramakrishna, like a boy, was eager to have the meeting. Partly to satisfy his own curiosity and to settle his own doubts, and partly to humour Sri Ramakrishna as well as to convince him of his eccentricities, Mathur consented to invite some of the scholars of the day to the garden of Dakshineswar to test the soundness of the Brahmani's contention.

It was decided to invite Vaishnav Charan and Gauri Kânta, two famous scholars. A great devotee, Vaishnav Charan at that time was one of the leaders of his society, an adept in various philosophies and scriptures—specially in books on devotion. A real Sadhaka,[1] he was eagerly sought by the people of his sect for advice in their respective paths of Sadhana. By inviting him, Mathur had chosen the right man. And Gauri, too, was pre-eminently fitted for the task he was called upon to perform.

In a few days Vaishnav Charan arrived at Dakshineswar with other scholars and devotees, and a small meeting was held in which the Brahmani, Mathur, and Sri Ramakrishna were present. Addressing the Pundits, the Brahmani explained to them what she had heard about Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices and what she herself had observed, the conclusions of the scriptures on this point, and lastly, what she thought about the real nature of Sri Ramakrishna. Turning to Vaishnav Charan she said, "This is my honest conviction about this God-man based on the interpretation of certain facts according to the scriptures. I really believe him to be an Incarnation of God. Now please state your reasons if you differ from me." Like a heroic mother, she held herself in readiness to answer all objections. And what about the man around whom this discussion pivoted? Sitting in the midst of that assembly, he looked like a boy, perfectly indifferent to the verdict, as if it did not concern him at all. We can picture him sitting at ease, immersed in his own blissful thoughts, sometimes smiling, sometimes taking a pinch of spices from a pouch, or again saying to Vaishnav Charan, "Look here, sometimes I feel like this, or that." The result of the meeting was that Vaishnav Charan subscribed heartily to all the conclusions of the Brahmani. Further he asserted that the supreme devotion known as the Mahabhava seemed fully manifest in Sri Ramakrishna. It was really wonderful, he added, that while in certain extraordinary cases only a few of its divine characteristics had been noticeable, in Sri Ramakrishna all of them seemed to be fully manifest. Mathur and others were struck dumb at this bold assertion of Vaishnav Charan. Sri Ramakrishna, like a boy, said to Mathur, "To think that he should say so! It pleases me to learn that after all it is not disease."

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[1] One actually engaged in religious practices and discipline.

That Vaishnav Charan did not say these things out of mere sentiment was proved by his attitude towards Sri Ramakrishna. With every day of their acquaintance, his regard and esteem for the Master deepened. He became a frequent visitor to the Kali temple of

Dakshineswar, where he sought the advice and guidance of the Master in spiritual matters. He occasionally invited other devotees of his order to accompany him, so that they, too, might consult Sri Ramakrishna. Vaishnav Charan belonged to the Kartâbhajâ[1] sect of the Vaishnavas. At a place a few miles north of Calcutta, he had a number of devotees, of both sexes, who practised Sadhana under his guidance. At his request Sri Ramakrishna visited there a number of times. But the familiarity between the sexes in this sect—the real cause of its degeneration—was always repugnant to him. He shuddered at the licence prevalent among them and could not reconcile their professions with their actual practice. But even here there were some sincere devotees, which led him to revise his opinion of this cult. Thenceforth he concluded that a man, though engaged in some apparently reprehensible form of Sadhana, could progress spiritually and ultimately attain to the goal if he only performed it sincerely as a religious practice. As days went on, Vaishnav Charan was so impressed with Sri Ramakrishna's pure character and wonderful spiritual life that he felt no scruple in proclaiming him to be an Incarnation of God.

A few days after this memorable meeting, Pundit Gauri Kanta Tarkabhushan of Indesh, District of Bankura, arrived at Dakshineswar. He was a great Sadhaka of the Tantrika school, and every year during the Durga Puja worshipped his own wife as a representation of the Mother. He had a strange method of making sacrifice (Homa). Instead of arranging the sacrificial faggots on the ground, as is the usual custom, he would pile them—a weight of some eighty pounds—on the palm of his outstretched left hand. Then he would set fire to them with his right hand and hold them in that position till the ceremony was over. Sri Ramakrishna himself saw him do it and used to say it was one of his extraordinary powers.

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[1] A small sect in Bengal, the adherents of which look upon their Guru as God.

On the arrival of Gauri Pundit at Dakshineswar an amusing incident occurred, which Sri Ramakrishna would often narrate to his devotees. Gauri was far-famed as a great scholar, and nobody could stand before him in debate. People ascribed this to his miraculous powers. Whenever challenged to a meeting of scholars, he would enter the hall thundering the refrain of a hymn to the Divine Mother, adding some martial syllables in order to inspire awe. It is said that this chanting served a twofold purpose, that of unnerving his opponents and awakening a strange power in him. Sri Ramakrishna would say that when he entered in this belligerent manner, it was impossible for anybody to defeat him in argument. Gauri entered the precincts of the Kali temple in the usual fashion. Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his own room and did not know anything about the Pundit's powers, but he was impelled by some power within him to utter the same words as Gauri was intoning, but in a louder voice. At this the latter raised his voice to a higher pitch, to which the Master replied by shouting louder. This competition between the two seemed so like the raid of a gang of dacoits that the guards ran from all sides with their clubs. But to their surprise they found that it was nothing but a contest between the Pundit and their mad priest as to the respective strength of their lungs! Gauri, not being able to raise his pitch higher than Sri Ramakrishna, had to acknowledge defeat and entered the compound with a sullen countenance. Sri Ramakrishna afterwards said that the Divine Mother had transferred to him the great powers which had made Gauri invincible in debate, but which acted at the same time as a barrier to his realisation of God. In the course of a few days Gauri was charmed with the wonderful character of Sri Ramakrishna and surrendered himself wholly to him.

A few days after the arrival of Gauri, Mathur convened another assembly of the Pundits, to which, of course, Vaishnav Charan was invited. The object of the meeting was, as before, to test the mental and spiritual state of Sri Ramakrishna by the touchstone of the scriptures. The meeting was to take place in the morning, and the place chosen was the big hall in front of the Kali temple. Seeing that Vaishnav Charan was late in coming, Sri Ramakrishna proceeded towards the appointed place with Gauri. Before taking his seat in the hall Sri Ramakrishna entered the Kali temple and bowed before the goddess. He was coming out of the temple overwhelmed with emotion when Vaishnav Charan appeared and touched his feet. Sri Ramakrishna at once fell into a trance. A thrill of divine joy passed through Vaishnav Charan's heart, and thinking himself greatly blessed at the holy touch, he began to praise the Master by composing then and there a Sanskrit hymn. The radiant countenance of Sri Ramakrishna and the reverent pose of Vaishnav Charan as he uttered the melodious verses in his exuberance of joy, filled everybody with bliss. After a while the Master returned to his normal state, and all slowly moved on to the place of meeting.

The proceedings commenced. Gauri said, addressing the assembled Pundits, "Vaishnav Charan is really fortunate. He has received divine favour today; so I shall not argue with him. Even if I did, I should certainly be defeated. Besides I find that we both agree on the main issue and have both arrived at the same conclusion regarding Sri Ramakrishna. Any debate, therefore, is superfluous." Not that Gauri was afraid of his opponent's scholarship, but the fact was that he himself had come to feel, through his own spiritual insight, that Sri Ramakrishna was no ordinary saint. One day the Master by way of testing him said, "Vaishnav Charan tells everybody that God has incarnated Himself in this body. How is it possible? What do you say?" "Is this all he says about you?" replied Gauri gravely: "Then he has said too little. I am firmly convinced that you are that mine of infinite spiritual Power, only a small fraction of which appears in the world from time to time in the form of Incarnations."

"Ah," said Sri Ramakrishna with a smile, "you seem to outbid him in this matter. What do you find in me which leads you to entertain this idea?"

"I feel it in my heart," replied Gauri, "and the scriptures are on my side. I am ready to prove my contention to anybody who challenges me in the matter."

"Well, it is you who say so," Sri Ramakrishna said like a boy, "but believe me, I know nothing about it."

Thus the two great scholars who came to test Sri Ramakrishna ended by surrendering themselves at his feet.

This was the first important episode in the life of Sri Ramakrishna since his meeting with the Brahmani. In the swift march of events that followed, it is impossible for us to fix our attention on the more important and deeper currents of thought which left a profound impress on the lives of both Sri Ramakrishna and the Brahmani. The relationship gradually became deep and intimate. Sri Ramakrishna accepted her as one of his Gurus and under her guidance practised a most difficult course of Tantrika Sadhanas. The spiritual outlook of the Guru herself was considerably broadened, as we shall see, by contact with her wonderful disciple.

The thing that comes uppermost to our minds in this connection is the strange fact of his accepting a woman as a Guru. Happening in the life of a man whose chief advice later to his devotees may be summed up in the phrase, "renunciation of woman and wealth," and who seemed to consider the presence of a woman the greatest obstacle to a man in the path of Sadhana, this incident is all the more significant and deserves careful consideration. In spite of his warning against association with women, the Master accepted one as his spiritual guide and sat at her feet for instruction. He demonstrated thereby that there is nothing innate in a woman that obstructs a man's spiritual progress—rather it is the attitude of the man towards her that helps or hinders. If one loves a woman for her physical charms only, she degrades instead of ennobling, but if one looks to the divinity of her nature and sees the Mother of the universe manifesting through her, she will help to cut the bonds of matter and show the way to bliss. Woman cannot be shunned, for in this world you cannot escape her. So long as there is the idea of sex, it will follow you everywhere. You can evade it only by regarding woman as mother or sister or daughter—that is, in the purest of relationships. But if you insult her—use her as a toy for pleasure—the nemesis of her wrath will follow you even to the outermost limits of the world. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated in his life the proper attitude of man towards woman and *vice versa,* a precious boon to humanity for all time to come.

Secondly, from the time of this contact Sri Ramakrishna's Sadhana took a new direction and flowed through new channels. Hitherto he had tried to realise God without any external help or guidance. He had received no help from his first Guru, Kenaram Bhattacharya, except at the moment of initiation. By his own tremendous efforts, under the guidance of the ever-wakeful Teacher concealed in the hearts of all, Sri Ramakrishna had achieved the apparently impossible feat of transcending all the limitations of finite existence, and uncovering his true relationship with the One Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, in the compass of a few short years. By his zeal and devotion to God, his renunciation of worldly things, phenomenal perseverance, and unflagging determination, he removed the last barrier of nescience from his mind, and divine Truth stood revealed before him in all its purity and splendour. We learn from his Sadhana that in attempting to realise the divine we do not aspire after something new or extraneous. What does not really belong to us, can never be ours. By our struggle we only discover what in reality belongs to us. And for this glorious culmination, the first thing that is needed is zeal. Without this element in the struggle, without tenacity of purpose, no amount of spirituality injected from without, no amount of scriptural knowledge, pilgrimage, association with devotees, prostration, or genuflexion will be of any avail. But the idea is too abstract—too high and sublime—for the average person. Therefore we see myriads of scriptures and endless processes of Sadhana, which take the aspirant step by step to the supreme goal. The lives of saints, prophets, and Incarnations of God serve only to awaken in our hearts a burning desire to get rid of ignorance.

In the person of the Brahmani Sri Ramakrishna found a living Guru under whose guidance he proceeded, as we shall see later on, along the path marked out by the scriptures, to arrive ultimately at the same truth which he had realised before by his own unaided efforts.

Thirdly, it is clear from Sri Ramakrishna's meeting with the Brahmani that all necessary help is brought to the sincere soul at the proper time; and if he only fervently prays to God, he is looked after. It teaches us the lesson that all that we require in religious life is to kindle a great zeal for divine realisation, and the rest will be added unto us when necessary. Impatience only mars the peace and sweetness of life without helping us in any way.

And the last, though not the least, important point about this historic meeting was the correct evaluation of Sri Ramakrishna's personality and his potential greatness. Up to then everybody had measured the depth of this unique life by the foot-rule of his own shallow experience. Even Mathur was no exception. So while the realisations of the Master were being weighed in the balance by incompetent judges, it was the Brahmani who turned the scale overwhelmingly in his favour by her declaration. The matter, perhaps, would have stopped there, had she not challenged the world to disprove her if it could. What the result was we already know.

Thus the recognition of Sri Ramakrishna's greatness may be said to date from the time of the Brahmani's arrival at Dakshineswar. It was she who strung together and found a meaning for the hitherto isolated and neglected facts of his life, and pointed out their tremendous significance. She was the first to be convinced of his great mission—the role he was to play in the future adjustment of the world's spiritual ideas—

and she knew her own part in it too. She set herself to work for the fulfilment of this divine purpose and faithfully contributed her own quota of service towards the unfoldment of this wonderful life.

And a word about the man who was suddenly transported by her from a region of ignominy to one of universal homage. From the opprobrium of supposed lunacy to the supreme honour of Avatarhood is a jump sufficiently long to turn the head of any mortal, however sane. But simple child of the Divine Mother as he was, this adoration and praise did not affect him in the least. He kept his gaze fastened on the lotus feet of the Mother and yearned only for Her guidance and inspiration. A crown was offered to him and he set it aside—not like a Cæsar as we see in the play, but actually and definitely. For praise or blame—acceptance or rejection—is nothing but a phantom of Mâyâ to him whose mind always soars in the transcendental region of Eternal Truth.

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TANTRIKA SADHANA

Man has a natural tendency to enjoyment and does not welcome renunciation. He finds it difficult to call upon the Lord in a pure and simple way, and instinctively hugs to his bosom some illusion in the midst of truth. Even when renouncing lust and wealth, he would like a passing glimpse of them. Hence it is that we find in the sacred books immediately after the definite statement that the worship of the Divine Mother should be performed in the purest way possible, room is made for sensuous songs on the plea that these will be pleasing to the goddess. There is nothing to be wondered at in this tendency of the human mind. It only shows how strong are the ties of sense-attraction with which the Mother of the universe has bound Her creatures. The painful idea is perceived that unless She out of Her infinite grace leads us out of this intricate maze, we are powerless. It is not flattering to our vanity to realise that She alone knows the way out.

In tracing the origin of the Tantrika mode of worship, we have to go back to the Vedic times when both enjoyment and renunciation were sought to be combined in the Karmakânda or the ritualistic portion of the Vedas. The goal of human life in that age seems to have been the regulated enjoyment of sense-objects, by propitiating the gods through prayers and sacrifices. When in this way the mind was somewhat purified, and divested of lower desires, then the man took up the higher course of discipline prescribed in the Upanishads. But with the advent of the Buddhistic age things took a different turn. The methods of worship which were suited to pure-souled recluses alone were prescribed for the ordinary householder, irrespective of his taste or capacity, and the laws of the state lent countenance to this. The result was that the Vedic sacrifices, which had in view the object of gradually weaning the aspirant's mind from the enjoyment of the senses, were replaced by a system of clandestine worship —conducted in dreary, out of the way places, at dead of night—so that outsiders, and specially the emissaries of law, might get no clue. There seems to be a good deal of truth in the statement that the Tantrika rites were introduced by the Lord Shiva in place of Vedic rituals, which in the course of time had fallen into disuse. For not only do they combine enjoyment and renunciation like the Vedic rites of old, but one also finds in them an intimate connection between the ritualistic portion and philosophy—which were distinct branches in the Vedic age. Every act of worship according to the Tantras necessitates some sort of meditation on the unity of the aspirant with the Lord—of the Jiva with the Paramâtman. For instance, sitting down to worship, one has to mentally raise the Kundalini Shakti—the resultant of the past impressions or the entire potentiality of a man supposed to be coiled up at the lowest extremity of the spinal column—to the "thousand-petalled" lotus in the brain, and think of this symbol of the aspirant himself as identified with God residing there. Then he is to imagine himself as separate from Him, with the spirit of the Lord condensed into a luminous form of god or goddess which is to be worshipped. He projects Him out of himself on the image or symbol before him and worships Him. After the worship is over he mentally withdraws the deity into himself. Now, on reflection it will be found that in this process of worship a fine attempt has been made to realise the ultimate object of human life, viz identification with the Lord, through love. It is true that only one in a thousand may be able to perform the above meditation in a proper way, but none can deny the fact that all at least may try to do so, and this effort in itself is a slow advance towards the goal. Thus, every Tantrika rite invariably directs the mind of the worshipper to the underlying unity of existence.

Again, the Tantras teach the motherhood of God and, simultaneously with it, a glorification of woman. Neither in the Vedas nor in the Puranas do we come across this idea. In some portions of the Vedas it appears in a rudimentary form, where the husband is instructed to look upon the body of his wife as sacred and to worship the gods therein, so that she may be the mother of a worthy child. The Tantras sublimated this old idea and developed it along new lines, with conspicuous results, for it was found suited to certain temperaments of the age. This may have been the origin of the Virâchâra form of Tantrika practice in which wine and women play a part. The authors of the Tantras were right in their assumption that the average man should have a share of the good things of life. And as he enjoys he is to see God in the objects of enjoyment. Then he will not be carried away by his pursuit of the senses, and at some time or other he will set himself to cultivate self-control and renunciation. Hence they declared that the woman's body is sacred, that one should always look upon a woman as a goddess and, realising her as one of the manifestations of the Mother of the universe, treat her with all respect. Maltreatment of women was strictly forbidden.

But in spite of this forethought on the part of the inaugurators of this system, its followers with the lapse of time, became slaves to passion and, instead of trying to realise God; they sought to acquire small physical powers with the aid of the Tantrika rites. This marked the origin of grotesque ghost and demon worship and led to the abominations which we find in the Tantras of today. Hence in every Tantra one meets with a higher and a lower form of worship, and every one chooses according to his taste.

The main idea of the Tantras, then, is the deification of the objects of the senses, which ever lure man and bind him in an endless chain of births and deaths, preventing his realisation of God. They seek to accustom the struggling soul to look upon these sense-objects as visible representations of the Lord, so that his inordinate attachment to them may be curbed. According to the qualifications of the aspirants, the Tantras prescribe three different modes of practice. They are called Pashubhâva, Virabhâva and Divyabhâva,—or animal, heroic, and divine attitudes—in an ascending order. In the devotee of the first type there is a predominance of animal propensities. For him the instruction is that he should avoid all objects of temptation as far as he can, and engage himself in Japa and such other practices with strict regard to purity. In the second class of aspirants, who are comparatively advanced, the devotion to God supersedes the cravings of the senses, and the sense-attractions only heighten the longing for God. They are advised to live in the midst of temptations and try to concentrate on the Lord, unshaken by the jarring elements of the outside world. The third and highest type of Sadhaka is he who is far above the reach of the sense-impulses, who has been swept away from them by a tidal wave of yearning for God-realisation, and to whom the practice of truth, forgiveness, compassion, contentment, and such other attributes has become as natural as respiration. From the above the readers will perceive that the practices of the Tantras bear fruit only when the aspirant makes self-control the bed-rock of his endeavours.

The Tantrika influence permeates every system of worship in India at the present day, including Vaishnavism. Only, the Vaishnavite teachers have introduced certain changes in the worship of the Tantras which are worth noting. They consider dualistic teachings more beneficial to men, and accordingly have laid stress only on that portion of the Tantrika rites, viz their theory of Mantras and external worship. Into this worship they have infused a new spirit and advise people to serve the Lord according to the promptings of their hearts. The Tantrika gods purify the offerings made to them by merely looking at them; and the devotee by partaking of this consecrated food gradually becomes purer in mind. The Vaishnava reformers taught not only that the gods take the essence of those offerings, but that, in certain cases depending on the devotion of the aspirant, they may also partake of the material offering as well. Amongst the many changes these teachers introduced into the method of worship, the most important was the emphasis they laid on the preliminary course of Tantrika worship, Pashubhava, and they gave strict injunctions about purity being observed in every act of the aspirant—in his food, mode of life, and everything. They also laid great stress on Japa or repetition of the Lord's name as a means to God-realisation.

But in course of time evils crept into this cult also. Forgetting the inner significance of the masters' teachings, the followers adopted measures to suit their own tastes. The Âchâryas had cited the great attraction between a lover and his mistress as an example to emulate in their quest after God. But they went the length of carrying it into actual practice, debasing the old, pure form of worship with their own tendencies. It is the same story everywhere.

From the above sketch another thing will have struck the reader. It is this, that for the criticisms usually levelled against the Tantras—or for the matter of that, any abused form of practice—not the Tantras, but the innate tendency of man to gravitate towards enjoyment is responsible. The Tantrika rites can be practised without wine or sex-indulgence, as is amply proved in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Evidently it was to equip him as a supreme teacher for modern times that the Divine Mother made him undergo the Tantrika practices.

It has already been stated that the Brahmani, from the very first, bore a motherly affection towards Sri Ramakrishna. Though she believed in the divinity of Sri Ramakrishna, yet under the promptings of motherly solicitude she forgot the aspect of grandeur in the Master, and treated him as a son. But she never forgot the divine mandate she had received to deliver her message to him, and she did her best to act as spiritual guide to Sri Ramakrishna.

But Sri Ramakrishna himself, as he stated later on, undertook this new course of Sadhana only after he had sought and received the permission of the Divine Mother. He set himself to it with the zeal characteristic of him. The Brahmani collected the rare ingredients necessary for the Sadhana and brought them to Dakshineswar. Two Âsanas or seats were made, according to the Tantrika books, one in the Panchavati and another under the Bael tree, at the northern extremity of the garden. Referring to this period the Master would afterwards say, "The Brahmani would go during the day to places far from Dakshineswar and collect the various rare things mentioned in the Tantrika scriptures. At nightfall she would ask me to come to one of the seats. I would go, and after performing the worship of the Mother Kali I would begin to meditate according to her directions. As soon as I would begin to tell my beads, I would be always overwhelmed with divine fervour and fall into a deep trance. I cannot relate now the varieties of wonderful visions I used to have. They followed each other in quick succession, and the effects of those practices I could feel most tangibly. The Brahmani put me through all the exercises mentioned in the sixty-four principal Tantra books. Most of these were extremely difficult Sadhanas—some of them so dangerous that they cause the devotee to lose his footing and sink into moral degradation. But the infinite grace of the Mother carried me through them unscathed."

The many fiery ordeals through which he passed during this period testify in the highest degree to his complete conquest of his passions. They proved once for all that the Master was firmly established in the eternal truth, and that the passing phenomena of the world with all their varied charms could not make him deviate from his one-pointed devotion to the Mother. With the utmost swiftness and ease he ascended the steps of this difficult course of exercises till he reached the topmost rung of the ladder. His mind was always pitched to the highest level of spirituality, and from that lofty altitude he could find nothing that did not, somehow or other, remind him of the Mother. The universe appeared before his clarified vision in its true perspective. By the very nature of the Tantrika rites he had to witness scenes which would have tested to the full the fortitude and self-control of the most stalwart of men, but the impression they carried to his mind was always that of divine bliss unalloyed by any worldly taint. To him, as he floated in a limitless ocean of divine beatitude, there remained nothing evil. The Brahmani declared that her divine disciple had attained perfection in this system of Yoga and had passed through its extreme tests successfully, a thing which very few Sadhakas indeed could do. Throughout he kept intact his ideal of motherhood in all women, and never partook of wine. Woman, to him, was always the emblem of the Divine Mother, and the very mention of the word Kârana[1], the technical term for wine, would suggest to his mind the great Mother of the universe, the First Cause, and inebriate him with a divine joy which made him forget all about the world.

At this time he lost the sense of distinction between holy and unholy. Even a street-girl reminded him of the Mother. Words grossly offensive to the ordinary man appeared to him as but a group of letters—and every letter, he believed in accordance with the verdict of the Shastras, was a symbol of the Divine Mother. Nay, these would sometimes throw him into Samadhi—as was repeatedly observed later—on account of their suggestion of the Blissful Mother. He would find himself wrapped in the flames of knowledge, both inside and out. But his most remarkable experience during this period was that of the upward march of the Kundalini Shakti. Sri Ramakrishna afterwards described it thus in his own inimitable way: "Something rises with a tingling sensation from the feet to the head. So long as it does not reach the brain I remain conscious, but the moment it does so, I am dead to the outside world. Even the functions of the eyes and the ears come to a stop, and speech is out of the question. Who should speak? The very distinction between 'I' and 'thou' vanishes. Sometimes I think I shall tell you everything about what I see and feel when that mysterious power rises up through the spinal column. When it has come up to this, or even this (pointing to the heart or the throat), it is possible to speak, which I do. But the moment it has gone above this (pointing to the throat), somebody stops my mouth, as it were, and I am adrift. I make up my mind to relate to you what I feel when the Kuṇdalini goes beyond the throat, but as I think over it, up goes the mind at a bound, and there is an end of the matter!" Many a time did the Master attempt to describe this state, but failed every time. One day he was determined to tell and went on until the power reached the throat. Then pointing to the sixth centre, opposite the junction of the eyebrows, he said, "When the mind reaches this point one catches a vision of the Paramatman and falls into Samadhi. Only a thin, transparent veil intervenes between the Jiva and the Paramatman. He then sees like this—," and as he attempted to explain it in detail he fell into Samadhi. When his mind came down a little he tried again, and again he was immersed in Samadhi! After repeated fruitless attempts he said with tears in his eyes. "Well, I sincerely wish to tell you everything, but Mother won't let me do so. She gagged me!"

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[1] The primary meaning of the word Karana is cause. By usage it has come to mean wine as well.

Referring to the different ways in which the Kundalini rises to the brain, the Master often said, "Well, that which rises to the brain with a tingling sensation does not always follow the same kind of movement. The scriptures speak of its having five kinds of motion. First, the ant-like motion; one feels a slow creeping sensation from the feet upwards, like a row of ants creeping on with food in their mouth. When it reaches the head, the Sadhaka falls into Samadhi. Second, the frog-like motion; just as frog makes two or three short jumps in quick succession and then stops for a while to proceed again in the same way, so something is felt advancing from the feet to the brain. When this reaches the brain the man goes into Samadhi. Third, the serpentine motion; as snakes lie quietly, straight or coiled up, but as soon as they find a victim, or are frightened, they run in a zigzag motion, in like manner the 'coiled up' power rushes to the head, and this produces Samadhi. Fourth, the bird-like motion; just as birds in their flight from one place to another take to their wings and fly, sometimes a little high and sometimes low, but never stop till they reach their destination, so that power reaches the brain and Samadhi ensues. Fifth and last, the monkey-like motion; as monkeys going from one tree to another take a leap from one branch to another and thus clear the distance in two or three bounds, so the Yogi feels, the Kundalini go to the brain and produce a trance."

These experiences he would explain at other times from the Vedantic standpoint as follows: "The Vedanta speaks of seven planes, in all of which the Sadhaka has a particular kind of vision. The human mind has a natural tendency to confine its activities to the three lower centres—the highest being opposite the navel—and therefore is content with the satisfaction of the common appetites such as eating and so forth. But when it reaches the fourth centre, that is, the one opposite the heart, the man sees a divine effulgence. From this state, however, he often lapses back to the three lower centres. When the mind comes to the fifth centre, opposite the throat, the Sadhaka cannot speak of anything but God. While I was in this state I would feel as though struck violently on the head if anybody spoke of worldly topics before me. I would hide myself in the Panchavati where I was safe. I would fly at the sight of worldly-minded poeple, and relatives appeared to me like a yawning chasm from which there was no escape if I once fell. I felt suffocated in their presence—almost to the point of death, and would be relieved only when I left them. Even from this position a man may slip down. So he has to be on his guard. But he is above all fear when his mind reaches the sixth centre—opposite the junction of the eyebrows. He gets the vision of the Paramatman and remains always in Samadhi. There is only a thin trasparent veil between this and the Sahasrâra or the highest centre. He is then so near the Paramatman that he imagines he is merged in Him. But really he is not. From this state the mind can come down to the fifth, or at the most, to the fourth centre, but not below that. The ordinary Sadhakas, classed as 'Jivas', cannot come down from this state. After remaining constantly in Samadhi for twenty-one days, they break that thin veil and become one with the Lord for ever. This eternal union of the Jiva and the Paramatman in the Sahasrara is known as going into the seventh plane."

Sri Ramakrishna also saw the Ultimate Cause of the universe as a large luminous triangle which was giving birth every moment to an infinite number of universes. He often heard the Anâhata—a great solemn sound like the Om, produced by the conglomeration of the infinite variety of sounds in the universe. Some say that they heard from the Master himself that he could understand at this time the language of beasts and birds.

As an added result of his spiritual realisation, he had free use of the eight Siddhis or supernatural powers which make man a god—almost omnipotent. But the Mother showed him in a vision that for a real devotee these powers were worthless. From that time he always thought of them with repugnance and used to warn his devotees against them.

It was at this time that he had a vision of the Divine Maya—the inscrutable way in which the Lord brings about the projection, preservation, and dissolution of the universe. He saw a woman of exequisite beauty ascend from the Ganges and slowly approach the Panchavati. Presently he noticed that she was about to be a mother. In a short time she gave birth to a lovely child and was nursing the babe with the utmost tenderness. A moment later he observed that she was no longer tender, but had assumed a terrible aspect. She put the child between her grim jaws and crushed it to pieces! Swallowing it she again hid herself in the Ganges! This is the way the Divine Enchanter hypnotises the world again and again with the phenomena of birth, growth, and death, and it perceives not Him who befools it with this never-ending game.

He also saw innumerable goddesses; some of them talked to him and advised him in various ways. He used to say that though all of them possessed exceptional beauty, yet Shorhashi or Râjarâjeshwari surpassed all others in loveliness.

As a result of his success in the Tantrika practices, he became like a child. He could not keep on the wearing cloth or even the sacred thread. In spite of him they would drop off.

For some years from now, his complexion was so beautiful that he attracted attention everywhere. He used to wear a gold amulet on his arm, and it could hardly be distinguished from the golden colour of his body. Sri Ramakrishna himself said, "People used to stare at the loveliness of this form. The chest and face were always flushed, and the whole body seemed to be luminous. To escape public notice I had to wrap a stout sheet round my body. I prayed to Mother, 'Take back Thy outward beauty, Mother, and give me instead Thy inner beauty, and purity of the spirit.' I used to stroke the body gently and repeat, 'Dive inward.' After a long time the exterior became dull as it is now."

The revelation came to him about this time that later on many devotees would seek his guidance in spiritual matters. He spoke about this to Mathur, Hriday, and others. Mathur rejoiced and said, "Very well, we shall all be happy in your company."

The most remarkable feature about Sri Ramakrishna's Tantrika Sadhana is that he attained perfection in every course in an incredibly short time—three days being sufficient. Needless to say, it was because he had already realised the Mother of the universe that all subsequent Sadhanas became so easy. It was like the case of a master musician who feels himself at home, no matter how difficult is the music he is called upon to play. Not only was Sri Ramakrishna's perfection in this Sadhana unique and unprecedented, but it is also to him that the restoration of the purity of the ancient Tantrika practices was due. Therein lay his greatness.

IN THE COMPANY OF DEVOTEES AND SCHOLARS

The reader will remember that the Brahmani was commissioned to convey a divine message to two other devotees. She would often say to the Master, "If you are willing, I shall write to them to come here." One day he gave her the permission, and in due course Chandra came. The Master was invited that day to visit the Brahmani, though she had kept Chandra's arrival secret. She and Chandra were talking together when he entered the room. The Brahmani greeted him, and shortly afterwards he fell into a trance. Suddenly he shouted, "Ah, here is Chandra! Is this not Chandra?" Then he became motionless. Chandra took hold of his hands and called him loudly by name three or four times. The Master soon came back to normal consciousness. "You seem to know me," said Chandra, "why did you forget me so long?" "It was the Lord's will," replied the Master. They conversed for some time. Chandra was a great devotee, and Sri Ramakrishna loved him. He said that Chandra was endowed with some of the power of the Lord Vishnu, and it was because of this that he could restore the Master to a normal state of mind from Samadhi so easily. But he looked so insignificant that Hriday seriously doubted his spiritual greatness, and called it in question. Sri Ramakrishna silenced him. But one day when Chandra came to see Sri Ramakrishna the latter said to Hriday, "Just put an ochre cloth on him and then mark the result." When this was done Chandra was overwhelmed with a strange emotion. With a smile Sri Ramakrishna drew Hriday's attention to the transformation.

Chandra had acquired, in course of his Sadhana, a power by means of which he could make himself invisible. Sri Ramakrishna said that Girija, the other protege of the Brahmani, had similar powers. He, too, came to Dakshineswar. One evening he accompanied the Master to the neighbouring garden of Shambhu Charan Mallick, who was a great admirer of Sri Ramakrishna and thought it a rare privilege to be of service to him. All three were so engrossed in spiritual discussion that they did not notice that evening had deepened into night. When the Master and Girija turned their steps towards Dakshineswar, it was so dark that they stumbled. Sri Ramakrishna was particularly distressed. Seeing him in this plight, Girija suddenly stopped and said, "Wait a bit, brother, I will give you light." Then he turned his back and from it a powerful light was emitted which lit the way up to the gate of the Kali temple. The Master said that he easily found his way with the help of that light. "But," he concluded the narration, "neither Chandra nor Girija retained those powers. While they lived with me, the Gracious Mother took them away, so that they might turn their attention without distraction to the realisation of God."[1]

We have already said that the Kali temple of Dakshineswar was a favourite resort of devotees and Sadhus because of its seclusion and holy association, as well as of Rani Rasmani's liberality. Pointing to some of his disciples of English education, Sri Ramakrishna once said, "It was only after the coming of Keshab

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[1] In the year 1899, soon after the Swâmi Vivekânanda's second departure for the West, a gentleman came to the Belur Math and gave himself out as Chandra. Swami Brahmânanda, President, was there at the time. They used to hold long conversations in private. He said that all the prophecies of Sri Ramakrishna about him had

Chandra Sen that 'Young Bengal' began to frequent this temple ; but long before that, innumerable monks, ascetics, and devotees of various orders used to stream in here. They would stop here for a few days on their way to Gangasagar or to Puri. That was before the opening of the railways. At special times, Sadhus of a particular class would congregate in large numbers. Once monks belonging to the Râmâyat sect of Vaishnavas began to come. Their devotion, faith, and steadfastness to service beggar all description. It was from one of them that I got Râmlâlâ.[1] Another Sadhu belonging to this sect had a wonderful faith in the name of God. All he had was a water-pot and a book. The book was his treasure. He worshipped it daily with flowers and from time to time pored over it. After I knew him, one day I pressed him hard to let me have a look at it. On opening it I found on every page only two words—Om Rama—written in bold red letters. 'What is the use,' he explained to me, 'of reading a library of books? God is the one origin of the Vedas, the Puranas and all other scriptures, and there is no difference between Him and His name. What is contained in the four Vedas, the eighteen Puranas and in all other sacred books is comprised in one of His names. So I am satisfied with His name alone.' Such was his

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come to pass. Only one remained to be fulfilled, and that was the Master's promise to meet him at his death. He used to pass long hours in meditation and prayer at the chapel with tears running down his face. He would gladly relate those incidents of Sri Ramakrishna's life which he knew. He was a plain-looking, quiet man and loved to sit in a retired corner of the Math. The first time he entered the chapel he was extremely moved on seeing the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna and addressed him as brother. He said that he had made pilgrimages to various holy places in India. Swami Brahmananda invited him to live in the Math permanently, but he went home on business and did not return. He probably was the 'Chandra' referred to above.

[1] The incidents about Ramlala are described in the next chapter.

tremendous faith in the Lord's name! So people of this class continued to come for some time. When their visits became less frequent a different class of men, monks of the Paramahamsa order, began to come in—not vagabonds, but real Sadhus. There would be a regular crowd in this room day and night, and the one theme of their discussion was Vedanta—the nature of Brahman and Maya and all that. I was then suffering from a terrible attack of dysentery, and Hriday was nursing me. But I always followed those discussions, and when they were unable to come to any decision on a mooted point, someone from within this (pointing to his own body) would throw out a suggestion in simple words, and everyone would be satisfied."

The Master sometimes related interesting tales about some of the monks he had thus met. He said, "One day a Sadhu came, with a serene light on his countenance. He would sit for hours at a time smiling to himself. Coming out of his room mornings and evenings, he would look at the sky, the Ganges and the trees, and raising his arms dance with joy. Sometimes he would roll in laughter and shout, 'Bravo! What fun! How beautiful is this projected universe!' That was his prayer and meditation after he had tasted of the sweetness of Divine Bliss. I remember another monk who had attained to the highest illumination and yet looked like a madman. Naked, covered with dust with long hair and nails, and a nasty quilt-like cloth round his body, he looked like a ghoul. He stood before the Kali temple and chanted a hymn to the Mother with such fervour that the whole temple shook, as it were, and the Mother seemed delighted. Then he went to eat with the beggars. But even they turned him out because of his repulsive appearance. Then I found him taking the leavings of the beggars' meals with some dogs, from the heap of discarded leaf-plates. He had one of his arms around a dog's neck, and man and dog were eating from the same leaf. The dog was quite at home with him. Watching this scene I was inwardly horrified, lest I too should become the same. I came away and said to Hriday that he was not an ordinary lunatic, that his was the madness of Knowledge. At this Hriday ran after him and found him going out of the temple compound. He followed him to some distance, begging for some instructions as to how he might realise God. At first the monk said nothing, but finding Hriday persistent he stopped, and pointing to some ditch-water on the road-side said, When this ditch-water and the water of the Ganges appear just the same to you, then you will realise God.' Hriday wanted to hear something more and prayed to be allowed to follow him as a disciple. But the monk went his way without replying. When he found that Hriday persisted in following him, he took up a brick to throw at him and put him to flight. Then he quickly disappeared, and Hriday lost track of him. Great Sadhus often live like that to escape public notice. That man was a real Paramahamsa."

Then the Master described the characteristics of a Paramahamsa: "Scripture says that he lives sometimes like a child, sometimes like a ghoul, and sometimes like a madman. He allows children to be near him and tries to imbibe their simplicity and non-attachment. You must have noticed how glad a child is when his mother gives him a new piece of cloth. If you ask him for it, he will refuse to give it and say, 'No, I won't give it. Mamma has given it to me.' And he will hold the cloth tightly and watch lest you should snatch it from him, as if his whole soul were on it. But a minute later, if he finds in your hand a toy, not worth even a farthing, he will say, 'Give me that, and I will give you the cloth.' A moment after perhaps he will throw the toy away and run after a flower. He is attached to nothing. A real Jnani is like that."

Some time during this period (1862–1863), Sri Ramakrishna had a desire to supply the devotees with the various requisites of worship, so that they might practise their Sadhana peacefully, and he would have the pleasure of watching it. He spoke about it to Mathur, who forthwith arranged for a large store of goods in the Kali temple to be left completely at the disposal of Sri Ramakrishna to distribute as he liked. Besides foodstuffs such as rice, flour, ghee, etc., there were blankets, water-pots, and Kamandalus, even the intoxicants commonly in use among the Sadhus and the Tantrikas, of whom there was a large influx at that time. The Tantrikas would form mystic rings, which they often invited him to join. Sometimes he was made the leader. At first they asked him to taste the consecrated wine, but later on, finding that he could not take it, and that mere mention of it was sufficient to induce religious intoxication in him, they desisted. In deference to the custom prevailing in these sittings, Sri Ramakrishna would either touch a drop of wine to his forehead or smell it, or at the most put a drop on his tongue with his finger. He noticed that there were some who after drinking would sit for meditation and become absorbed in it; but most of them drank because they liked wine, and instead of praying became boisterous. So he stopped the supply of wine altogether.

The meeting of these exponents of different ideas with Sri Ramakrishna was of great significance. True spiritual fervour is extremely contagious. No sooner had Sri Ramakrishna attained perfection in following a particular form of Sadhana than devotees of that type came to Dakshineswar. They exchanged ideas with him, and the tales of his tremendous realisations made them desirous of instruction and of attaining the same results. The ideas of practical spirituality which had their origin in the Prophet of Dakshineswar, were disseminated through these Sadhus to their own disciples and followers, thus laying the train for a great spiritual upheaval throughout the country. Even those fortunate persons whom he accepted as teachers, were enabled to realise subtle truths which had hitherto been to them more or less matters of theory or intellectual speculation.

We learn from the Master's own declaration, that as soon as he finished with the Tantrika Sadhana under the guidance of the Brahmani, various Tantrika devotees from different parts of the country were attracted to Dakshineswar. This happened again when he achieved perfection in the Vaishnava ways of Sadhana as well as in that of the Advaita.

The advent of a spiritual genius like Sri Ramakrishna augurs well for the regeneration of India. At no other period of her history was India threatened with such utter ruin as in the middle of the last century. Various disruptive forces were about to extinguish her ancient culture and civilisation. This was manifest in all phases of her life—social, political, and economic. Religion, the backbone of Indian life, had been forgotten, and the worst propensities of human nature—sloth, hatred, sham, and sensuality—took its place and paved the way for the rankest materialism. For a moment everything seemed to be lost. But the safety of the world demanded that India must live, its philosophy should be as a heaven of peace for world-tossed souls. To prepare herself for this great task, she needed spiritual reorganisation. Nothing less than a spiritual giant like Sri Ramakrishna could do this. To quote a Brâhmo writer[1]: "A living evidence of the depth and sweetness of Hindu religion is this good and holy man. He has wholly controlled his flesh. He is full of soul, full of the reality of religion, full of joy, full of blessed purity. As a Siddha Hindu ascetic he is a witness of the falsehood and emptiness of the world. His witness appeals to the profoundest heart of every Hindu. He has no other thought, no other occupation, no other relation, no other friend in his humble life than his God. That God is more than sufficient for him. His spotless holiness, his deep unspeakable blessedness, his unstudied, endless wisdom, his childlike peacefulness and affection towards all men, his consuming, all-absorbing love for God are his only reward." In these beautiful lines is summed up the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus at a most critical moment of Indian history a messenger from Heaven came to bring about India's renaissance.

By instinct, as it were, the genius of the nation knew that its saviour was come. It sent men of renunciation by the hundred, to fill their cups at the overflowing fountain of spirituality at Dakshineswar. They sat at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, and heard from his lips the tidings of another world. Every man, of whatever denomination, found in him the fulfilment of his ideal. He showered his treasures unstintedly on them. Himself a Sadhaka of the highest type, he guided different people along their respective paths, without upsetting their modes of thought or trying to make them think alike. All great teachers do this. They supplement but do not supplant. By their own Sadhana they revive forgotten spiritual truths and again proclaim them to the world, according to the needs of the time. And the great prophet of India realised that the different forms of her religion promulgated by its ancient sages are but so many gems in the crown of Indian spirituality—complementary, not antagonistic. And having demonstrated for himself that the truth is the basis of all religious methods, he proclaimed the message of the new era—devotion to one's own ideal and sympathy for all others.

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[1] Reverend P. C. Mazumdar.

Among the many devotees and scholars who came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna at different periods, some took initiation from him, others were benefited in different ways by his influence, as we have seen in the cases of Vaishnav Charan and Gauri Pundit. The latter was deeply impressed by the experience of his first visit to Sri Ramakrishna. Some years later, about 1870, we find him again at Dakshineswar, studying at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. The spirit of renunciation began to dominate his life. Disgusted with scholarship, prestige, and powers, he was gradually realising that devotion to God was the only thing worth while in the world, and he determined to consecrate his life to realising Him. All his former love of argument and debate was gone. He realised the folly of dissipating his energy thus instead of using it in search of truth. He had allowed many opportunities to slip by; now he was determined to devote every moment of the few years left to God-realisation.

Some months passed. The Pundit's long absence from home made his people anxious. They had heard a report that a strange transformation had come over his mind since he had come in contact with an insane Sadhu at Dakshineswar. So they wrote to him frequently urging his return. Gauri had a suspicion that they might come to Dakshineswar to take him away. After much thought he hit upon a plan and one day, prostrating himself before Sri Ramakrishna, with tears in his eyes he asked leave to go. "Well, Gauri," said the Master, "what is the matter? Where are you going?" With folded hands Gauri replied, "Bless me that my desire may be fulfilled, and that I may not return to the world before realising God." After that he disappeared.

Another man of this type came to Sri Ramakrishna—Pundit Nârâyan Shâstri from Rajputana, an orthodox Brahmin of the old type. He had moulded his life according to the ancient Hindu ideal, and for twenty-five years lived a Brahmacharin's life in the house of his Gurus, in the course of which he became versed in different scriptures. It was his ambition to acquire the knowledge of the six schools of Indian philosophy. After studying five of them under various distinguished scholars of Northern India, he came to Bengal to learn the Nyâya philosophy from the Pundits of Nadia. The Maharaja of Jaipur hearing of his erudition wished to make him chief Pundit of his court at a high salary, but, being desirous of prosecuting his studies still further, he declined the offer and spent seven years at Nadia, assimilating the complex philosophy of the Nyaya school, after which he came to Calcutta on his way home.

Unlike the generality of scholars, Narayan Shastri was not content with the study of books. Sincere and devoted, he knew that mere reading of philosophy did not imply assimilation of the subject; he saw that realisation and book-lore were quite distinct from each other, and that the former was infinitely greater than the latter. Occasionally the idea came to him that he should devote himself exclusively to the aim of all philosophies—the realisation of Truth. But he decided to wait until he had finished his studies. It was his good fortune to meet the saint of Dakshineswar when this was done.

He was greatly attracted. In order to study under Sri Ramakrishna he determined to stay at Dakshineswar. The more he saw of him, the more he loved and revered him. The Master was glad to have such a sincere disciple, and spent hours with him in spiritual discussion.

Narayan Shastri had read in the Vedanta about the seven planes of spiritual development, and how as the mind of the devotee ascends higher and higher, it sees strange visions, until it reaches the last plane, where oneness with the Brahman is realised through Nirvikalpa Samadhi, and the bondage of ignorance is left behind for ever. These were matters of intellectual speculation to him, and such words as "supersensuous perception" and "Samadhi" were vague ideas to him. Now he saw a man in whose life these subtle truths were realised facts, enacted time and again before his very eyes. "What a strange thing!" the Pundit thought: "Where can I find a better teacher to explain the truths of the scriptures? I must not lose this golden opportunity. Nothing is so certain as death. I must make a serious attempt to realise the Lord and be free." Every day this thought dissociated him more and more from the world. With a rare spirit of humility he sat at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna and tried to assimilate his words of wisdom. Often he said to himself, "Look at this saint! He has realised the goal of life, and armed with that knowledge, how calm he is! Even death has lost its sting for him. The Upanishads declare that whatever such persons wish, comes to pass without fail, and those who take refuge with them soon reach the end of their earthly desires and attain to Illumination. Why should I not make him the pole-star of my life?" But he feared to be rejected as unfit by Sri Ramakrishna, and days passed by whilst he was trying to gather courage to ask the Master to become his Guru.

In the mean time an incident took place which is worth mentioning here. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the great Bengali poet, a Christian, and Barrister-at-Law, was called to Dakshineswar by Dwârakâ Nâth son of Mathur, for consultation about a law-suit. Hearing of Sri Ramakrishna, he expressed a desire to see him. The Master was requested to come to Madhusudan. He did not wish to go and sent Hriday instead. Dwaraka Nath again asked the Master to come. This time he accepted the invitation and went with Narayan Shastri. The Shastri had a talk with the poet in Sanskrit, in the course of which he asked him why he had embraced Christianity. The poet is said to have replied that he had been compelled to do so for pecuniary reasons. "What!" replied Narayan Shastri in a reproachful tone, "for such a trifle you gave up your precious religion! You should have preferred starvation." The Pandit was disgusted and did not talk to him further. The poet then implored Sri Ramakrishna to give some advice.

"Somebody is pressing my lips," replied the Master, "I cannot utter a word."

"I am your humble servant," said the poet, "so why should you not favour me?"

"That is not the point. I want to speak with you, but somebody is pressing my mouth and preventing me from speaking," said the Master.

The poet was naturally mortified. A few minutes later, however, Sri Ramakrishna sang some well-known devotional songs, which consoled Madhusudan. Narayan Shastri expressed his disgust at the poet's conduct by writing in charcoal in Bengali characters on the wall in front of Sri Ramakrishna's room that it was foolish to give up one's religion for the sake of the stomach. This used to attract the notice of visitors long after the incident.

One day Narayan Shastri met Sri Ramakrishna when he was alone and begged to be initiated into Sannyasa. The Master yielded to his importunities. Soon after he bade adieu to Dakshineswar. Nothing further is definitely known of him. Some say he went to the Vasistha Asrama in Assam, determined to lay down his life if need be in the struggle for realisation. He probably died there. Sri Ramakrishna often spoke of him to his devotees.

Not content with receiving Sadhus and other devotees, Sri Ramakrishna, without waiting for an invitation, would often seek those who were known for their quest of the Truth, to talk with them. He did not care whether or not he would be well received; his sole concern was to meet different devotees and to find out how far they had progressed towards their ideal. He never failed to estimate a man according to his deserts—be he of humble or high position. Pundit Padmalochan, Devendra Nath Tagore, Bhagavân Dâs Bâbâji and Swâmi Dayânanda Saraswati were some of these he visited about this time. We shall tell of his meeting with Padmalochan.

Pundit Padmalochan Tarkâlankâr was the court-Pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan and a great scholar. After mastering the Nyaya philosophy he went to Banaras to study the Vedanta. There he lived with a teacher till he mastered it, when he returned to Bengal. His fame had already spread far and wide, and the Maharaja of Burdwan engaged his services as a scholar. Soon he became the chief of the Pundits of the court and a recognised authority. Coupled with his great scholarship were austerity, liberal-mindedness, devotion, and a scrupuluos regard for the ancient Hindu customs. The combination of scholarship with love for God is so seldom seen in the same person that one possessing it stands out from his fellows. When Sri Ramakrishna heard of him he wished to meet him. He expressed his desire to Mathur and repeatedly asked him to make some arrangement to bring about the interview. Realising that life is transient and that whatever one desires to do must be done at once, he showed a child-like eagerness for the meeting. Mathur was about to send him to Burdwan, when news was brought that the Pundit had come to Calcutta to regain his health and was staying at a garden of Ariadaha. The Master sent Hriday to find out if this were true. Hriday confirmed the news and said that the Pundit was equally anxious to meet Sri Ramakrishna.

A day was fixed, and in the afternoon Sri Rama-Krishna, accompanied by Hriday, went in a boat to see the Pundit. He was very cordially received. After exchanging a few words, Sri Ramakrishna sang some devotional songs in his characteristic way, which deeply moved the scholar. He was much impressed by the frequent trances into which the Master fell in his presence, and considered himself fortunate to have met Sri Ramakrishna. Addressing those present he remarked, "What I could not acquire by reading cart-loads of books, he has got without turning over a single page, and infinitely more besides!" After telling Hriday that he regarded Sri Ramakrishna as divine, he said to the Master, " I shall read out to you my written discussions on God with Utsavananda Goswami and others. Then my labours will be fruitful." Padmalochan was strongly attracted by Sri Ramakrishna, who in his turn was deeply impressed by the Pundit's sincerity and wisdom. This pleasant meeting led to several subsequent ones, in the course of which the Pundit became convinced that his first impression of Sri Ramakrishna was true, and came to have implict faith in him. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell the following interesting anecdote illustrative of the Pundit's simplicity. Once there was a dispute in the court of the Maharaja of Burdwan as to the comparative greatness of Shiva and Vishnu. One party tried to prove Shiva was the greater, while the other held the opposite view. When the dispute was at its height, Padmalochan as chief Pundit was called in to give his verdict. After hearing both sides he said, "Neither I nor any one in my line has ever seen Shiva or Vishnu. So how can I tell you which is the greater? But if you wish to know what the scriptures say on the point, the Shiva scriptures give the foremost place to Shiva, while the Vaishnava scriptures extol Vishnu. Each is great to His respective devotees." Both parties were reconciled by this opinion.

In the course of the practice of Tantrika Sadhanas Pundit Padmalochan acquired some extraordinary powers. He always kept beside him a vessel full of water and a napkin. Whenever he was formally asked to solve any difficult problem, he would walk a few steps, wash and wipe his face, and then give the matter his consideration. This was done according to the direction of his favoured Deity, and was never omitted, for by it he was made invincible in debate. It was a profound secret, and none, not even his wife, knew of it. There was nothing in this habit to excite anybody's suspicion. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that he came to know of it through the grace of the Divine Mother and one day managed to hide the Pundit's water-vessel and napkin. A question awaited immediate solution, and the Pundit, before answering, looked for them. He was surprised to find they were missing. When he found that it was Sri Ramakrishna who had removed them, he was astonished. But his amazement knew no bounds on learning that the Master had purposely so done. He was overwhelmed at the thought that Sri Ramakrishna had fathomed the innermost contents of his mind, and with tears in his eyes sang the praises of the Master, knowing him to be no other than his Chosen Deity. This incident led the Pundit to surrender himself completely at the Master's feet and so greatly strengthened his faith that he said to him (as Sri Ramakrishna himself used to tell his disciples), "As soon as I recover, I shall have all the scholars summoned to a meeting where I shall declare you to be an Incarnation. I should like to see any one with the boldness to challenge my statement."

The following will also give an idea of the Pundit's great regard for Sri Ramakrishna. In the year 1863 Mathur, at an enormous expense, gave to the Brahmins a thousand maunds of rice and other foodstuffs, besides large quantities of gold and silver. He made arrangements for a musical festival of some days' duration, to which Sri Ramakrishna was invited. It is said that Mathur made presents of costly shawls, silk clothing, and hundreds of rupees to the singers, judging their merits by the degree of the Master's satisfaction, as revealed by his trances. Mathur wished to invite Pundit Padmalochan, but he was afraid that being an orthodox Brahmin, the Pundit would refuse. Nevertheless he sent the invitation, but through Sri Ramakrishna. The Master said to Padmalochan, "Will you go to Rani Rasmani's garden?" "Why not?" replied the Pundit without a moment's hesitation. "With you I can go and dine at even a scavenger's house.

Attending a meeting in a Shudra's house is a small matter!"

But Padmalochan had not the opportunity to fulfil his promise. His illness became worse, and finding no relief in Calcutta he resolved to pass his last days at Banaras. So he took leave of Sri Ramakrishna and went to Banaras, where shortly afterwards he died.

In this connection it is worth noting that long after the Pundit's passing, when some of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples and followers openly proclaimed him as an Incarnation, he asked them again and again to desist. Finding his wishes disregarded he said in annoyance, "One of them is a doctor and another the manager of a theatre, and they come here and call me an Incarnation! They think that by doing so they add to my prestige—make me appear great in the eyes of the world. But what do they understand of the significance of an Incarnation? Long, long before their coming here with their new discovery, great authorities like Padmalochan, who spent their whole lives in the study of such subjects and were masters in all or most of the different schools of philosophy, came here and openly procalimed this (meaning himself) as an Incarnation, time and again, till I became sick of the idea! So what do they mean by repeating this old, old thing!"

Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Ârya Samâj, once paid a brief visit to Calcutta and stayed at a garden in the suburbs. Though already known as a great scholar, he had not yet made known his doctrines or founded his Samaj. Sri Ramakrishna visited the Swami, and referring to him said to some of his disciples later on, "I went to see him at the garden of Sinti. He had a little power. I found his chest always red owing to congestion. Day and night he discussed the scriptures. With the help of grammar he went on distorting the meaning of many passages of the Shastras. He seemed to have the ambition of doing something original—starting a new sect."

Another great man whom Sri Ramakrishna met was Pundit Jaynârâyan. This was what the Master said about him: "He was a great scholar, but had no trace of egoism in him. He knew beforehand about his own death and prophesied that he would give up his body at Banaras. It actually came to pass."

Krishnakishore was another great devotee whom Sri Ramakrishna frequently visited. He was a worshipper of Rama and lived at Ariadaha. Referring to him Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "When a state of divine intoxication overpowered me, I could not endure the company of worldly people. I was mad after God and longed to listen to spiritual topics alone. I looked for places where the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavata* or the *Adhyatma Ramayana* was to be heard. Occasionally I went to Krishnakishore of Ariadaha to hear him read the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. He had wonderful faith. He had been to Vrindaban. One day feeling very thirsty he came to a well near which a man was standing. He asked the man to draw some water for him. The man replied that he was of low caste and could not do so. Krishnakishore told him to utter the name of Shiva and be at once purified. This he did and drew water from the well, and Krishnakishore drank it without any scruple. On another occasion, a Sadhu came to Ariadaha. Wishing to visit him I said to Haladhari, 'Krishnakishore and I are going to see a Sadhu. Will you accompany us?' Haladhari replied, 'What's the use of going to see a mere framework composed of the five elements?' He used to study the Gita and Vedanta, and that was the way he talked. When I told Krishnakishore about it he flew into a rage and said, 'Had he the audacity to speak like that! Is the man who worships God, meditates on Rama, and has sacrificed all for Him to be slighted thus! Haladhari ought to know that the body of a devotee is of spirit all compact.' It was Krishnakishore's belief that once a man took His holy name, he was pure and spotless. Haladhari denied this and said that Ajâmila, too, later on practised austerities for God, proving that it was not enough to say Narayana once. This disgusted Krishnakishore so much that he would turn his face away from Haladhari when he met him in the Dakshineswar garden.

"One day he said to me, 'Why have you thrown away your sacred thread?' A cyclone of spiritual longing had blown off everything about me. It revolutionised my life. How could I take care of the sacred thread, when even the cloth would not stick to its place? I said to him, 'If you ever become mad like me, then you will understand it.' It actually happened. He himself became mad. He would sit alone in a corner of his house and mutter, 'Om'. His people thought he was suffering from a nervous disease and consulted a physician. Krishnakishore said to his physician, 'Well, you may cure me of my illness, but not of saying Om!' He suffered great bereavement when he lost two grown-up sons. One of them, however, died uttering the name of Rama. Krishnakishore said, 'Ah, he should not be mourned as he took Rama's name at death.' But still now and then the afflicted man would burst into tears!"

We shall conclude this chapter with an account of two young devotees about whom Sri Ramakrishna often spoke tenderly. They were frequent visitors to Dakshineswar, presumably about this period, and were named Govinda and Gopâl.

Govinda was an oilman's son and lived at Baranagore. Young as he was, he was nevertheless, full of devotion and spent much of his time in the company of Sri Ramakrishna, listening to his recital of his personal experiences and other religious topics. The Master loved him very much and asked him to come to Dakshineswar often. One day the boy sought his permission to bring his friend Gopal with him. Gopal often fell into trances when listening to discussions on spiritual subjects. One day Gopal touched Sri Ramakrishna's feet and took his leave. He said that the world was too much for him, so he was departing from it. For some days the Master had no news of the boys. Then Govinda came and told him that Gopal had passed away. The Master was deeply touched by the news. Shortly after this Govinda, too, breathed his last.

RAMLALA

The incident of Ramlala is one of the most affecting episodes in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, because it shows how the Supreme may be approached and realised through the channel of human sentiment. Through it is demonstrated the truth that God is neither a hard taskmaster nor an eternally receding abstract entity, but the nearest and dearest of all, always willing to make Himself known to His devotees. If we but stretch one hand out to touch Him, He responds with both, so kind and so loving is He!

It was probably about the year 1864 that Jatâdhâri first came to Dakshineswar. He was an itinerant monk and a devotee of Rama. In his close association with Sri Ramakrishna he was able to guide him in some of the various modes of worship. The Master often said that Jatadhari's love and yearning for God was peerless. Ramlala or the "Child Rama" was his favourite Deity, and he gave himself up to his service. By long meditation and worship Jatadhari had made great progress in spirituality and had been blessed with a wonderful vision of Rama. His mind remained always on a high level of spiritual consciousness. The distractions of the world were left far behind, and he saw in the image, which he always carried about with him, the effulgent form of the young Rama, occasionally at first, but later constantly, so that eventually his beloved Ishta Deva became a living presence to him. The service of Ramlala was his sole preoccupation. He nursed him, fed and played with him, and at night even put him to bed. He forgot everything else—his own personal comfort and pleasure—in this Sadhana.

Jatadhari had never told any one of his vision. But he could not hide it from Sri Ramakrishna. Intimately familiar with the various states of divine consciousness, he discovered Jatadhari's cherished secret. He observed the ecstasy that constantly overpowered the new Sadhu, and invited him to stay at Dakshineswar. He would spend hours with him watching his impassioned devotion to Ramlala.

"The Bâbâji,"[1] said the Master later to a group of disciples, "was the lifelong devotee of Ramlala, whom he carried wherever he went. He would cook whatever he got by begging and offer it to him. He actually found that Ramlala took the food; sometimes he would demand something else. Again he would act like a spoiled child. Jatadhari was engaged day and night in the service of the image and was in a state of constant bliss. I could see the actions of Ramlala; so I used to spend the whole day with the Babaji to watch him. Days passed in this way, and Ramlala became more and more intimate with me. As long as I remained with Jatadhari, Ramlala was cheerful, but the moment I left, he followed me to my room. No argument would affect him. At first I thought that it might be a hallucination, for how could Ramlala prefer me—practically a stranger—to Jatadhari whose whole life was spent in his service? I argued that I might be deceived once or twice; but this scene was repeated every day. I saw Ramlala as vividly as I see you all—now dancing gracefully before me, now springing on my back, or insisting on being taken up in my arms. Sometimes I would hold him on my lap. He would not remain there, but run to the fields in the sun, pluck flowers from thorny bushes, or jump into the Ganges.

[1] An appellation for Vaishnava Sadhus.

I would remonstrate saying, 'Don't run in the sun, your feet will get blistered. Don't remain so long in water, you will catch cold and get a fever.' But Ramlala would turn a deaf ear. He would fix his beautiful eyes on me and smile, or like a naughty boy he would go on with his pranks, or pout his lips or make faces at me. Sometimes I would lose my temper and cry, 'Wait, you naughty boy, I am going to beat you black and blue.' I would drag him away, and diverting him with various toys, ask him to play inside the room. But sometimes I lost patience and slapped him. With tearful eyes and trembling lips he would look at me. Oh, what pain I would feel then for having punished him! I would take him in my lap and console him. All these things actually happened."

"One day," Sri Ramakrishna continued, "I was going to bathe. Ramlala insisted on accompanying me. I took him with me. But he would not come out of the water, nor did he heed my remonstrances. Then I got angry, and pressing him under the water said, 'Now play in it as much as you like.' Ah, I saw him struggling for breath. Then repenting of my act I took him up in my arms. Another incident pained me greatly, and I wept bitterly for it. He insisted on having something which I could not supply. To divert him, I gave him some parched rice not well husked. As he was chewing them, I found his tender tongue was scratched. The sight was too much for me. I took him on my lap and cried out, 'Mother Kaushalyâ used to feed you with cream or butter with the greatest care, and I was so thoughtless as to give you this coarse stuff!' " In recounting the incident he was overpowered by the same feeling and wept so bitterly that his hearers were moved to tears. But they got a faint glimpse of the Master's impassioned love for Ramlala.

"Sometimes the Babaji," the Master went on, "after cooking his food could not find Ramlala. Being sorely distressed, he would run to my room and find Ramlala playing with me. In wounded pride the Sadhu would say, 'The food is ready, and I have been searching for you, and here you are playing at your ease! Well, that is your nature. You do whatever you like. You have no feelings. Hard and unkind, you left your parents and went to the forest.[1] Your father died of a broken heart, but you did not return even to see him on his death-bed.' Scolding thus he would take Ramlala away and feed him. The Babaji stayed here for a long time, because Ramlala would not go away from me, and the Babaji could not leave behind his dearly beloved Ramlala.

"One day Jatadhari came to me weeping and said, 'Ramlala out of his infinite grace has fulfilled my desire. He has revealed himself to me in the form I prefer, but he has told me that he will not go and leave you behind. But I am not distressed on that account. I am filled with joy to see him live here happily and play with you. I am satisfied when he is happy. I shall gladly leave him with you and go my way. It gladdens my heart to think that he is happy in your company.' With these words Jatadhari left Ramlala with me and bade adieu to Dakshineswar. Ever since Ramlala has been here."

This in brief is the story of Sri Ramakrishna's Vatsalya form of devotion to Sri Rama. Human love is but a faint reflection of divine love. Our attachments are usually prompted by worldly considerations and depend upon time, place, or circumstances; divine love is constant, undecaying and unconditioned. Even death cannot intervene between God and His devotee.

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[1] The allusion is to one of the famous episodes in the *Ramayana*.

God is very near, but our vision is so blurred by a thousand petty desires that He seems far off. Thousands of people may walk over a rich subterranean mine without dreaming of the treasures hidden underfoot. Only an expert gets the clue to their existence and digs them out. Thousands of men and women have seen Ramlala, but to every one of them he is nothing but the little metal image; if they are told of this episode in Sri Ramakrishna's life, they would consider it a poetical fancy. But an ocean of difference lies between the ordinary mentality and that of Sri Ramakrishna. Which of us can say that he has pined sincerely for God and had no response? Which of us can satisfy himself that he has searched for God with all his heart and soul, and yet has not felt Him speaking to him as did Ramlala to Sri Ramakrishna? The world is full of much talk with no practice. But God exists for all that. If the experiences of a single devotee are true, then in spite of all assertions to the contrary, God is true—sensed by others with the necessary zeal. He always reveals Himself to the true devotee in the form most pleasing to the devotee. Yes, we can see God and that more intensely than we see the world. He is the only shining Reality, of which all else is but a passing shadow. Seek Him in the right spirit, and you shall find Him. The trouble is that we are unwilling to go through the necessary discipline. For a material thing we can patiently wait for years, but in this most momentous of pursuits we will not wait. Hence our failure. It was because Sri Ramakrishna applied himself to the task with wonderful sincerity, renunciation, patience, and one-pointed zeal that he achieved success in an incredibly short time. There is no record in spiritual history to equal it.

If we inquire why after the completion of his

Tantrika Sadhana, Sri Ramakrishna was attracted to the Vaishnava ways of worship, of which his experiences with Ramlala formed a part, the reasons were various. The first and foremost was the combination of different qualities in his character. Stern as the most austere of Jnanis, he was at the same time loving as a Bhakta. Though a hard taskmaster and strict disciplinarian, he was as solicitous for the welfare of his disciples as a mother. These attributes are not contradictory when viewed from the highest standpoint, for they represent different attitudes of the mind towards the Truth. Usually a Sadhaka is satisfied with the realisation of only one aspect of God. But Sri Ramakrishna desired to know Him in every aspect. He knew no exhaustion, no satiety. He had scarcely attained the goal of one mode of worship when he took up another; his whole life was spent in seeking God in different ways and realising Him in diverse aspects. Secondly, it will be remembered that he was born of a Vaishnava family, his father being a devoted follower of Raghuvir. Born and reared in such environments, Sri Ramakrishna naturally leaned towards Vaishnavism. Lastly, the Brahmani, who was his teacher in the Tantrika Sadhana, was, as we know, herself a great Vaishnava devotee. So it was quite natural that Sri Ramakrishna should be attracted towards Vaishnavism.

During the first four years of his Sadhana, we saw him adopting the calm and placid attitude towards the Deity (Shanta), or that of a servant to his master (Dasya). We remember his following in the footsteps of Hanuman and his being blessed with the vision of Sita. Sometimes also he adopted the attitude of a friend towards the Divinity (Sakhya), in the manner of Shridama, Sudama, and the other companions of Sri Krishna. We hear of his attaining perfection in these different modes of Vaishnava discipline. Now he wished to try the two remaining modes of worship—the relation of parent to child (Vatsalya), and that of a girl to her lover (Madhura).

While practising Vatsalya Sadhana Sri Ramakrishna became possessed with the idea that he was a woman. He was helped in this through his inherent tenderness—a feminine quality. He forgot his masculine nature, and his speech and gestures so resembled a woman's that the women of Mathur's family, with whom he associated now, accepted him as one of themselves. We find him at this time worshipping the Divine Mother as Her handmaiden, fanning Her with great care or performing other similar services. His meeting Jatadhari at this juncture lent an added impetus to these tendencies and decided his particular form of worship, filling him with an absorbing love for the child Rama. He felt the same motherly love for the Divine Child as did the queen Kaushalya for her boy. Before Jatadhari left Dakshineswar he initiated Sri Ramakrishna into the Vatsalya form of worship. With characteristic zeal Sri Ramakrishna plunged headlong into this Sadhana, determined to reach the goal in the shortest time possible. In a few days he was not only blessed with a constant vision of Sri Ramachandra as the Divine Child, but he also found that He who appeared before him as the son of king Dasharatha, also pervaded every being—that He projected the universe and transcended it in His aspect of Pure Brahman, the One without a name, form, or attribute. So through following the prescribed forms of Vatsalya, he reached the same goal which he had hitherto attained by his own unaided efforts.

LOVE TRANSCENDENTAL

Sri Ramakrishna now took up the next and highest form of Vaishnava Sadhana—the Madhura Bhava or the relation between a mistress and her lover. In a previous chapter we outlined the principal features of the five forms of Vaishnava worship, all hinging on the potent factor of human life—Love. The reader must have noticed that in this ascending scale of worship the Sadhaka is less and less impressed with the grandeur of his Ideal; as he becomes freer and more intimate with the object of his adoration, only the sweetness of the relation interests him. Considered thus, the Madhura Bhava, representative of the closest union between the worshipper and the object of worship, is assuredly the highest of these practices, though through every one of them the aspirant may achieve oneness with his Beloved. That such oneness even produces physical transformation in the devotee is repeatedly borne out by the evidence of spiritual history. In the conjugal relation with the Deity of which we are speaking, the devotee thinks of his Beloved with the same intensity as a mistress dwells on the charms of her lover. Here there can be no artificial barrier, no obstructing social or moral tie. She pursues her object with the whole energy of her soul and is happy only when she has attained her end. This phase of religious practice was developed by Sri Chaitanya and his followers. In the Puranas, the religious history of ancient India, we find a beautiful expression of this form of worship in the Vrindaban episode of Sri Krishna's life. The milkmaids of Vrindaban were mad for Sri Krishna; they sought no personal ends; they did not care for their own happiness; their one object was to please Sri Krishna—the embodiment of beauty in all its phases—to whom they had surrendered their body, mind, and soul. The imagery used in the Puranas to describe this state of mind has, of necessity, been clothed in human language, and taken literally or superficially, seems sensual in the extreme. But as expressions of a condition of bliss far beyond the range of the sense (as we have been assured by Sri Ramakrishna they really are), they may be properly interpreted in one way alone—as the rhapsodies of the Gopis in a superconscious state expressed perforce in sensuous language. It might be interesting to our readers to interpolate here the philosophical meaning which is back of this religion of love.

In the masculine form of Sri Krishna is personified the idea of the Paramatman, the formless Existence, Knowledge, Bliss, Absolute—the Purusha, the Male Principle of the universe. Everything with form in the universe, whether gross or subtle, is the Prakriti—Infinite Nature or the Feminine Principle, the Consort of the Purusha—personified as Sri Radha. The attributes (Bhavas) characteristic of this Prakriti or Feminine Principle are nothing but different modes of approach to the Purusha, personified in the Gopis of Vrindaban. Chief among the Gopis is Sri Radha; She it is who is closest to Her Lord, and who becomes merged in Him; so She is the Mahabhava, the Great Bhava, the synthesis of all the other Bhavas, and at the same time the goal of them all. Hence, if one worships Him wholeheartedly, with absolute purity of spirit through any one of the Bhavas, one attains Mahabhava, and through it, the goal—liberation or Bliss Absolute. To make Radha's relationship with Krishna the basis of one's meditation, like her to feel pleasure only in that of

Krishna, to the exclusion of all personal motives, is the consummation of all other forms of devotion. The votary of the conjugal relation serves his Beloved like a servant, counsels Him, rejoices and sympathises in His joys and sorrows like a friend, and watches over His mental and physical comforts like a mother—endeavouring to please Him in all respects. The perfect devotee of this type is obviously one who looks only to the comfort of the Beloved, regardless of his own personal pleasure or convenience.

Though jarring to modern ears, this form of discipline has its value to the Vedantist. It is a matter of common experience to him that an idea may become so predominant in the mind as to force out all others and that this peculiarity of the mind may be used in the subjugation of the lower nature and the development of the spiritual one—like using one thorn to take out another. To illustrate: the idea which is the basis of all other ideas in the human being is the conviction of being a body, either male or female. If a man can so inoculate himself with the idea that he is not a man but a woman as to be to all intents and purposes a woman, that idea in turn may be made to give way to a higher one—that there is neither man nor woman. This is the idea back of the Madhura form of discipline. To the Vedantist, the aspirant who perfects himself in the practice of the conjugal relationship with God is very close to that transcendental state which is the goal of the Advaitist.

The Vaishnavite teachers differ from the Vedantists in that they deny that the ordinary man or woman can attain Mahabhava. Such limitation seems illogical, for, after all, the difference between Radha and her companions as given in the sacred books is not one of kind, but of degree.

We have seen that when Sri Ramakrishna embarked on any course of Sadhana, it was with such one-pointed zeal that everything but the things necessary to the Sadhana of the moment was disregarded. When the desire to practise the Madhura Bhava came to him, he asked and obtained from Mathur a complete outfit of women's clothing. Then began his life as a Gopi of Vrindaban, mad with love for Krishna. His every utterance and movement bespoke the intensity of his feelings, his grief at separation from Krishna and his desire to meet his Beloved. From observation of his actions at this period some idea could be gained of the throes of the Gopis when separated from their Lord. He spent six months in this state, at no time lapsing from the part he had assumed.

The milkmaids of Vrindaban used to worship Kâtyâyani, the presiding Deity, and beg the boon of Sri Krishna as husband. Sri Ramakrishna, too, at this time considered himself the handmaiden of the Divine Mother; but more frequently he served Radha and Krishna in this way.

During this period Sri Ramakrishna lived now and then with the women of Mathur's family in Calcutta. They felt no constraint in his company for they looked upon him as one of themselves. Every year Mathur used to invite him to his house during the Durga Puja festival. The following account of one year will show how remarkably Sri Ramakrishna adapted himself to the ways and manners of women during this period. As usual, Mathur made arrangements on a grand scale for the festival. Sri Ramakrishna's presence added a wonderful solemnity to the whole occasion. Mathur and his wife were overjoyed at having this rare opportunity of worshipping the Mother of the universe. The first day's worship was over, and preparations were made for the evening service. But an unexpected difficulty arose. Sri Ramakrishna, dressed in a silk cloth and looking exactly like a woman, was in one of his moods of absorption as an eternal attendant or companion of the Mother. Mathur's wife could not leave him alone in this trance state, to attend the evening service, for only a few days previously, while he was in such a mood, he had fallen on a pan of fire, burning himself badly. She was in a dilemma when an idea came to her. In haste she brought her valuable ornaments and began to adorn Sri Ramakrishna with them, saying to him all the time, "It is the time for the waving of lights. Won't you come and fan the Mother?" The words had their desired effect upon him. He partially recovered consciousness and in that half-awakened mood joyously accompanied her to the hall of worship. The ceremony began forthwith. Sri Ramakrishna, surrounded by the women, began to fan the goddess with a Chowry. At one end of the hall were the women, while at the other end stood Mathur with the men. Suddenly Mathur caught sight of a very respectable strange woman standing by the side of his wife, waving a Chowry to the Divine Mother. He looked at her again and again, but did not recognise her. He concluded it must be some friend of his wife. When the service was over, and the women were gone, Mathur asked his wife about the stranger. He was agreeably surprised to hear who she was, and said, "Well, it is impossible to recognise Father even in small things, unless he chooses to betray his identity!"

Hriday, too, used to say, "Even his nearest relatives could not pick out Sri Ramakrishna in a group of women. One day Mathur Babu took me into the women's quarters of his home and asked me to point out my uncle. Though I had been living with him for so many years, I did not recognise him at once." He further said, "At Dakshineswar, my uncle used to go to the garden every morning with a flower basket in his hand and collect flowers for offering. We observed that he always advanced his left leg first in the manner of women." The Bhairavi, too, used to say that at the time of his plucking flowers, she often mistook him for Sri Radha.

After praying to the Divine Mother for the boon of realisation of Sri Krishna as his Beloved, Sri Ramakrishna devoted all his energies to prayer at the feet of Sri Krishna and Sri Radha. He longed for the company of Sri Krishna passionately. The pain of separation from his Beloved was unbearable. Day after day, month after month, he spent in fervent expectancy of the vision of Sri Krishna. Nothing could diminish that fervour. He forgot food and drink and spent the whole day in bitter wailing. The eager expectation gradually turned into mad frenzy. The burning sensation all over his body which he had experienced twice before, reappeared. Minute drops of blood began to ooze from pores of his skin. At times the joints of his body seemed to be loosened; owing to the intensity of his anguish, his senses would stop functioning, and he looked like a corpse. The world has seldom seen such intense zeal.

As already said, Sri Radha's love for Sri Krishna was unparalleled even among the wonderfully selfless milkmaids of Vrindaban. So tradition says that it is impossible for one to be blessed with a vision of Sri Krishna unless one first obtains the grace of Sri Radha, whose pure love has for ever enthralled Sri Krishna. Sri Ramakrishna now appreciated the value of this propitiatory worship of Sri Radha and began to pray to her with single-minded devotion. Within a short time, Radha revealed herself to him. This time also he felt the figure vanish into his own body. The Master used to say, "It is impossible to describe the heavenly beauty and sweetness of Radha. Her very appearance showed that she had completely forgotten all personal considerations in her passionate attachment to Krishna. Her complexion was light yellow."

After this vision Sri Ramakrishna began to feel himself to be Radha. It was his constant meditation on her character that obliterated his own personality and transformed him into another Radha. Now was fully manifested in him that supreme passion and attachment which characterised her. He was the very picture of Mahabhava. The Brahmani and the learned devotees like Vaishnav Charan were amazed at this and found it to be identical with the unique state of Radha described in the Puranas, and of Sri Chaitanya, hundreds of years later. The Master referring to this period of his Sadhana said, "The manifestation, in the same individual, of nineteen different kinds of emotion for God is designated in the books on Bhakti as Mahabhava. An ordinary man takes a whole lifetime to express even a single one of these. But in this body (meaning himself) there has been a perfect manifestation of all nineteen."

This complete identification with Sri Radha and meditation with passionate love upon Sri Krishna brought the Master in a short time to the consummation of his practices. Sri Krishna in His exquisitely graceful form revealed Himself to him and fulfilled the hankerings of his soul. Then He merged Himself in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master remained for two or three months in a state of divine felicity. Forgetting his own identity he looked upon himself as Krishna, and he saw Krishna manifested in all creatures—sentient and insentient. Long after, he picked up a blue flower and showing it to his disciples said, "Such was Sri Krishna's complexion as He appeared to me during that practice."

Thus did Sri Ramakrishna reach the culmination of this form of Sadhana.[1] His agony of heart vanished in his glorious realisation of the Beloved. He had tapped the fountain of Eternal Bliss and was immersed in it till the time came for a still greater realisation—the Advaita. We shall conclude this chapter with the mention of one vision characteristic of this period. One day, he was seated in the verandah of the Vishnu temple listening to the reading of the *Bhagavata,* when he fell into an ecstatic mood and saw the resplendent form of Krishna. Next he found that luminous rays issuing from His lotus feet in the form of a stout rope touched first the *Bhagavata* and then his own chest, connecting for some time all three. The Master used to say, "After this vision, I came to realise that God, His devotee, and the scriptures, which are His words, though they appear to be distinct entities, are in reality one and the same."

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[1] For a further consideration of the Madhura Bhava the reader is referred to Swami Vivekananda's lecture on 'Sages of India' in *Lectures from Colombo to Almora.*

NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI

Beyond the realm of thought, transcending the domain of duality, leaving Maya with all her changes and modifications far behind, towering above the delusions of creation, preservation, and destruction, and sweeping away with an avalanche of ineffable Bliss all relative ideas of pain and pleasure, weal and woe, good and evil, shines the glory of the Eternal Brahman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, in the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Knowledge, knower, and known dissolve in the menstruum of One Eternal Consciousness; birth, growth, and death vanish in that infinite Existence; and love, lover, and beloved merge in that unbounded ocean of Supreme Felicity. Quelling all doubts and misgivings, stopping the oscillations of mind, exhausting the momentum of past action, breaking down the ridge-poles of that tabernacle in which the soul has made its abode for untold ages—stilling the body, calming the mind, and drowning the ego, comes the sweet joy of Brahman in that superconscious state. Space disappears into nothingness, time is swallowed up in Eternity, causation becomes a dream of the past, and a tremendous effulgence annihilates the oppressive darkness of sense and thought. The world with its myriad heavenly bodies melts away; even thought is hushed into silence; and only Existence is. Ah, who can say what the soul feels in its communion with the Self? He only knows that state who has experienced it! It is all stillness indefinable. The soul after a final struggle leaps over the last barrier of relative existence, shatters its prison of matter, and merges in the Infinite Glory of Brahman!

The Nirvikalpa Samadhi is the highest flight of Advaita philosophy. Truth is there revealed in its perfection and glory. The Sadhaka feels it as a tangible thing. His illumination is steady, his bliss constant, and the oblivion of the phenomenal universe is complete. Even when he descends from this dizzy height, he is devoid of the ideas of "I" and "mine" and looks upon the body as a mere shadow, an outer sheath encasing the soul. He does not dwell on the past, takes no thought for the future, and looks with indifference upon the present. Surveying everything with an eye of equality in this world of infinite variety, the liberated man is no longer touched by phenomena, nor by their reactions of pleasure and pain. He is the same if he—that is to say, his body—is worshipped by the good or tormented by the wicked, for he realises that it is the one Brahman which is manifesting throughout the whole of Nature. This is the crowning glory of man's spiritual exercises—the last word in his evolution. There is no more birth, no more death, nor any further identification with the changes of the body. He leaves behind all the modifications of relativity like a cast-off garment. He realises his identity with the Eternal Brahman, the One without a second, and knows that the former idea of himself as mortal, dependent on phenomena, was due to illusion and ignorance. It is authoritatively stated that for the ordinary Sadhaka there is no return from this exalted state to the normal plane; that after he has enjoyed this supreme bliss for a few days, the dissociation of his soul from the mind and body becomes complete, and the body dies. Only those who are born with some special mission in the world can return—in an inscrutable way—from this Samadhi. They live and move in the world for the welfare of mankind. They are invested with supreme spiritual power, and a divine splendour shines through them. They can transmit holiness and purity to others by a touch, a word, a look, or even a thought. This is the reason why such men are able to revolutionise the world.

Samadhi, broadly speaking, is a state of superconsciousness. It is leaving behind the world as perceived by the senses and soaring into supersensuous states which may range from the vision of subtle elements to the merging of the mind in the Absolute. Sri Ramakrishna's Samadhi covered a wide range of experience from his perception of various visions to the annihilation of his mind in the infinite consciousness of Brahman. It had also many forms. Sometimes he willed himself into them, at other times the strong current of his spiritual nature swept him into them in spite of himself. Thus he entered into a "world of power", or "a world of beauty", or "a world of spiritual grandeur", according to the nature of the suggestion from the external world. He would commune with invisible beings—forms of the Divinity or Divine Incarnations of the past. Such visions, however, belong to the domain of Personality, which is not the last word in spiritual experiences. So long as a Sadhaka is satisfied with this kind of Samadhi, his attainments cannot be said to be complete. He has not yet reached the unfathomable depths of the ocean, though undoubtedly he has gone far beneath the surface, encountering the forms of life abounding there, but he has not yet ransacked the priceless treasures of the deep, which reveal themselves only to those who have the courage to dive on and on till they have touched bottom. So we find Sri Ramakrishna taking up another course of Sadhana altogether different from his previous ones, and his success in this was as remarkable as the practice was difficult.

Before commencing this new chapter of his life, it is necessary to take a survey of his mind at this time to see how far it answered to the requirements. The scriptures lay down four great qualifications for aspirants in this line. First of all is the discrimination between the Real and the unreal, a firm conviction that Brahman alone is real and all else is unreal. Next is renunciation of the fruits of one's actions here and hereafter. Then comes the following group of attributes—control of the mind and senses, withdrawal from outside objects, forbearance, faith in the teacher and scriptures, and concentration. Lastly comes the yearning for freedom. Only he who is grounded in all these virtues is recommended to approach a teacher who knows the spirit of the Vedas, who is sinless and free from desire, who is compassionate, and above all a knower of Brahman, and, therefore, qualified to set him on the path of higher realisation.

Without going into unnecessary detail, we presume that the reader has seen that Sri Ramakrishna, with his whole mind resting on God and totally regardless of the body, was the very embodiment of discrimination. His renunciation was on a par with his discrimination, for the alpha and omega of his life was God; his one prayer to the Divine Mother uttered with the utmost sincerity of heart was to be freed from everything that the world holds dear, in order to attain pure devotion. The following incident narrated by Swami Premananda, a disciple of the Master, though happening much later, will illustrate Sri Ramakrishna's habitual spirit of renunciation.

One night as he was sleeping in the same room with the Master at Dakshineswar, he was awakened to find the Master pacing the floor in a strangely excited state, with his cloth hanging under one arm. At every turn he spat on the floor, remarking in a tone of utter disgust, "Fie! I spit on it! I don't want it, take it back, Mother! Don't tempt me with this trifle." All the time he was unconscious of the outside world, and his countenance glowed with emotion. The young disciple was at a loss to know what the trouble was. After some time Sri Ramakrishna regained the normal state and to the disciple's inquiry replied, "At dead of night I suddenly awoke from sleep, to find the Divine Mother approaching me with a basket in Her hand. She held it out to me and asked me to accept the contents, which were mine. At a glance I found that the Mother had brought me worldly honours. They looked so hideous to me that I turned my face in disgust and prayed to Her to take back Her allurements. Thereupon She disappeared with a smile."

We have also ample proof of Sri Ramakrishna's self-control and concentration, his faith as well as his yearning for the Lord. In fact, all these were as the very breath of his nostrils, requiring no effort whatsoever. Not only did he manifest all these rare traits of character, but their intensity was most striking. The field was thus ready ploughed and waited only for the sowing of the seed. At this moment Sri Ramakrishna met the spiritual guide who initiated him into the profundities of the Advaita Vedanta.

There came to the garden of Dakshineswar a wonderful man—wonderful both for his great Advaita realisation and for the practical demonstration of it in his life. Totâpuri, for that was the name of the august new-comer, was one of those itinerant monks who, realising Brahman as the only Reality and looking upon the world as a phantom, spend their life under the canopy of heaven, alike in storm and sunshine, maintaining themselves on the slender pittances got from beginning. It is said that Totapuri practised Sadhana in a secluded forest on the banks of the sacred Nerbudda and attained to the Nirvikalpa Samadhi after rigid discipline extending over forty years. A liberated soul, indifferent to the joys and sorrows of the world, he intended to spend the remaining years of his life in making pilgrimages to the holy places. Like a lion he roamed at will over the country. He had been to Puri and Gangasagar, and on the return journey along the course of the Ganges, halted at Dakshineswar. He did not see that the inscrutable Divine Will, for the fulfilment of a great mission, guided his footsteps to this new place.

Totapuri stopped at the main portico in front of the Kali temple, where Sri Ramakrishna, dressed in an ordinary Dhoti, was seated in an abstracted mood. But his bright face at once arrested the attention of Totapuri, who detected great parts in this plain-looking young man. The longer he looked at Sri Ramakrishna, the more he was impressed and at last said, "You seem to be an advanced seeker after truth. Would you like to learn Vedanta?" "I don't know. It all depends on my Mother. I can agree to your proposal only if She approves of it," was the quiet answer. "All right," said the monk, "go and ask your mother. I shall not be here long." Sri Ramakrishna silently left and went to the Kali temple. He spoke of the matter to the Mother and in a state of trance heard Her command: "Yes, my boy, go and learn of him. It is for this purpose that he has come here." In a state of semi-consciousness and with a beaming countenance, Sri Ramakrishna returned and said to Totapuri that he had his Mother's permission. Totapuri, though struck by the simplicity of the young man, must have smiled at his apparent superstition in addressing the image in the temple as mother. A great Vedantin, he believed in the Personal God only as the dispenser of fruits of action. Such a God was a mere logical postulate to him, and he did not believe in the efficacy of prayer or devotion to Him on the part of an aspirant for Self-realisation. Maya or Shakti—the kinetic state of Brahman, which Sri Ramakrishna looked upon as Mother—was to this Vedantist monk nothing but an illusion, so there was absolutely no need for him to propitiate Her to extricate himself from ignorance. He knew that man was bound by his own ignorance, and that man alone was able to shatter it to pieces through self-effort. But he said nothing to Sri Ramakrishna on the point, thinking that under his training the disciple would soon learn the truth and spontaneously brush aside all superstitions.

Totapuri told Sri Ramakrishna that he must be initiated with proper ceremonies into the sacred order of Sannyasa, before commencing to study the truths of Vedanta or practising the discipline prescribed in this course. He must give up the insignia of his present state of life, such as the sacred thread or the hair-tuft, which marked him as a Brahmin and householder, and begin a new life. Sri Ramakrishna said that he had no objection provided he could do so in private. He made this reservation for the sake of his old mother, who had left Kamarpukur about a year before to spend the remaining years of her afflicted life in the sacred precincts of the Dakshineswar temple, where Mathur's hospitality provided her with a room in full view of the Ganges, and all necessary comforts. It would be too much for her to see her son shave his head and take the monk's vow. Totapuri understood his difficulty and said, "All right, I shall initiate you privately at the proper time."

The auspicious day arrived. Sri Ramakrishna was asked by his Guru to perform the Shrâddha ceremony, or the prescribed oblations to his departed forefathers, for a Sannyasin is practically dead to the world and can no longer take part in such rites. Then he was asked to perform his own Shraddha, as he must give up the desire of going to other spheres to enjoy the fruits of his actions. He went through these exactly as he was told, and collecting the requisites for Sannyasa in his meditation room at the Panchavati according to the directions of the Guru, he fasted and joyfully awaited the final consecration. The night was almost spent. In the placid silence of the last half-hour, the most auspicious time for this initiation, the teacher and the disciple entered the meditation room. The Guru chanted the holy Mantras, which the disciple repeated as he put oblations one after another into the sacred fire, renouncing, as he did so, all desire for enjoyment, here and hereafter, and giving assurance of safety, as part and parcel of his own being, to all creatures. After the burning of his hair-tuft and sacred thread, he accepted from the Guru the emblems of a new life, the loin-cloth and the ochre robe.

The day dawned. It was a glorious day for India and indeed for the world, pregnant with immense possibilities for the future. The ancient religion of the Vedanta found a new apostle, and the world saw the appearance of a new man filled with the all-embracing love of a Buddha and endowed with the keen intellect of a Shankara. A new Prophet was born who was to be a bridge between the two worlds, the East and the West, and reconcile the faiths of the past with the exigencies of the future.

Prostrating himself before his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna took his seat to receive his instructions. To make him feel constantly his identity with Brahman, Totapuri began to teach him the cardinal truths of the Advaita Vedanta. "Brahman," he said, "is the only Reality, ever-pure, ever-illumined, ever-free, beyond the limits of time, space, and causation. Though apparently divided by names and forms through the inscrutable agency of Maya, that enchantress which makes the impossible possible, Brahman is really one and undivided. When a seeker is merged in the beatitude of Samadhi, he does not perceive time and space or name and form—the products of Maya. Whatever is within the domain of Maya is unreal; give it up. Pierce through the maze of name and form and rush out of it like a lion. Dive deep in the search for Self and be firmly established in It through Samadhi. You will then find the world of name and form vanishing into nothing, and this puny ego merging in the cosmic consciousness. You will realise your identity with Brahman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute." Quoting the scriptures he said, "That knowledge is shallow by which one sees or hears or knows another. What is shallow is worthless and can never give supreme felicity. But the knowledge in which one does not see, hear, or know another, which is beyond duality, is great and helps a man to attain the supreme Bliss. How can the mind and senses grasp That which shines in the heart of all as the Eternal Subject?"

Arguing in this way and supporting his arguments by scriptural quotations, Totapuri tried that day to help Sri Ramakrishna to fix his mind firmly in the Absolute. We describe it in Sri Ramakrishna's own words: "After the initiation, 'the naked one'[1] began to teach me the various conclusions of the Advaita Vedanta and asked me to withdraw the mind completely from all objects and dive into the Âtman. But in spite of all my attempts I could not cross the realm of name and form and bring my mind to the unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in withdrawing the mind from all other objects except one, the all too familiar form of the Blissful Mother—radiant and of the essence of Pure Consciousness—which appeared before me as a living reality preventing me from passing beyond the realm of name and form. Again and again I tried to concentrate my mind upon the Advaita teachings, but every time the Mother's form stood in my way. In despair I said to 'the naked one', 'It is hopeless. I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state and come face to face with the Atman.' He grew excited and sharply said, 'What! You can't do it! But you have to.' He cast his eyes around, and finding a piece of glass he took it up and pressing the point between my eyebrows said, 'Concentrate the mind on this point!' Then with a stern determination I again sat to meditate, and as soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my discrimination as a sword and with it severed it in two. There remained no more obstruction to my mind, which at once soared beyond the relative plane, and I lost myself in Samadhi!"

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[1] This was the appellation which Sri Ramakrishna, out of respect, invariably used for his Guru, who being a Nâgâ Sannyasin generally went naked.

Sri Ramakrishna passed into the ineffable glory of the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. In that rapturous ecstasy the senses and mind stopped their functions. The body became motionless as a corpse. The universe rolled away from his vision—even space itself melted away. Everything was reduced to ideas, which floated like shadows in the dim background of the mind. Only the faint consciousness of "I" repeated itself in dull monotony. Presently that too stopped, and what remained was Existence alone. The soul lost itself in the Self, and all idea of duality, of subject and object, was effaced. Limitations were gone, and finite space was one with infinite space. Beyond speech, beyond experience, and beyond thought, Sri Ramakrishna had realised the Brahman—had become the Brahman.

Totapuri sat for a long time, silently watching his disciple? Finding him perfectly motionless, he stole out of the room and locked the door lest anybody should intrude without his knowledge. Then he awaited the call from Sri Ramakrishna to open the door. The day passed on, the night came. Another day and still another—three days passed and there was no call. Totapuri was astonished and went to see what was wrong. He opened the door and entered the room. There sat Sri Ramakrishna in the very same position in which he had left him. There was no manifestation of life in the body, but the countenance was calm, serene, and radiant. He saw that the disciple was still dead to the objective world, his mind absorbed in the Self, without a flicker—absolutely steady!

With breathless wonder, Totapuri stood before this august spectacle. "Is it really true?" he said to himself: "Is it possible that this man has attained in the course of a single day that which it took me forty years of strenuous practice to achieve?" Impelled by doubt, he again made a searching examination. With the utmost care he determined if the heart was beating, or if there was the slightest trace of respiration. Again and again he touched the disciple's corpse-like body. There was no sign either of life or of consciousness. In joyous bewilderment he cried out, "Great God, it is nothing short of a miracle!" It was undoubtedly a case of the Nirvikalpa Samadhi—the culmination of the Advaita practice!

Totapuri immediately took steps to bring the mind of Sri Ramakrishna down to the world of phenomena. The little room in the Panchavati rang with the holy Mantra—Hari Om—uttered in a solemn voice. Little by little Sri Ramakrishna came to the consciousness of the outside universe. He opened his eyes and saw his Guru looking at him with tenderness and admiration. The Guru answered the worthy disciple's prostration by locking him in a warm embrace.

Totapuri usually did not stay at any one place for more than three days. But he wished to establish this wonderful new disciple, firmly on the lofty plane of Advaita, and he remained eleven months in the garden of Dakshineswar. We shall now describe some interesting events of this period which will throw a flood of light on the unique relation of Sri Ramakrishna with this great monk and the Bhairavi Brahmani, and show how in certain respects the disciple in his turn became the teacher of his Gurus.

RELATION WITH HIS GURUS

The reader is already aware that Sri Ramakrishna leaned more upon the prompting of his own pure mind for spirtiual instructoin than upon any outside help. A great scholar writing on this point has said, "Ramakrishna, having attained by his own internal effort the central illumination, accepted several teachers in the different paths of Yoga, but always showed in the manner and the swiftness of his realisation that this acceptance was a concession to the general rule by which effective knowledge must be received as by a disciple from a Guru." Those who have followed the course of events described in the foregoing pages cannot fail to appreciate the truth of the above remark. As a matter of fact, though the Master undoubtedly received a certain amount of guidance from these teachers and followed it implicitly, yet he always exercised a great influence on their minds and illuminated the dark and obscure corners of their hearts. Though a disciple, Sri Ramakrishna sometimes became their teacher; widening their spiritual outlook or giving a wonderful depth to their visions. And his Gurus bowed before him, acknowledging the truth of his wisdom.

Now a few words about Totapuri. He was probably a Punjabee by birth and had renounced the world while quite young. He was initiated by a Yogi who was the head of a monastery of the Naga sect at Ludhiana in the Punjab. The members of this sect are renowned for their austerity and power of endurance. After the passing away of his Guru, Totapuri took his place. He was a tall man with a robust constitution, and always led an outdoor life. Though a man of realisation, he used to spend a great part of his time in meditation. Like other members of his sect, he attached great holiness to fire, and wherever he might be, he kept a lighted fire by him. In the still hours of the night when everybody was asleep, Totapuri brightened his fire and taking his seat by it sank into deep meditation. A great part of the day also was spent in meditation. But few knew of it, as he used to lie near the fire, his body covered with a sheet, apparently asleep.

Totapuri possessed only a water-pot, a pair of tongs, a skin for his seat, and the sheet in which his body was wrapped. He used to clean his water-pot every day. Observing his regular habit of meditation Sri Ramakrishna one day said to him, "You have attained the highest knowledge. Why then are you so particular about meditation?" Pointing to his water-pot, Totapuri answered calmly, "See, how it glitters! Will it not lose its lustre if I do not rub it daily? It is the same with the mind. Unless one brightens it daily with meditation, it becomes unclean." The Master, while acknowledging the truth of the remark, said in turn, "But if it is made of gold? Then it won't require daily rubbing and scrubbing." "Yes, that is true," the teacher admitted with a smile. Sri Ramakrishna remembered these words of his Guru about the utility of regular meditation, and later on, when with his disciples and followers, often referred to them. Who knows if Totapuri remembered the retort of his disciple, whose character was like pure gold?

Totapuri seems to have studied the Vedanta and to have received spiritual instructions from his Guru at an early age. In their monastery there was an excellent arrangement for training the monks for meditation. Sri Ramakrishna would tell his disciples what he had heard from Totapuri on this subject: "There were seven hundred monks in their Math. Those who were beginners were taught to meditate sitting on thick cushions, for a hard seat would be uncomfortable for them and draw their minds from God to the body. As they progressed in meditation, they were given less and less comfortable seats, and finally only a skin or even the bare ground sufficed for the purpose. In food and other matters also the same graduation was observed. In dress, for instance, they were trained by degrees to go without clothes. Well, man is by his very birth fettered with the eightfold tie of shame, hatred, fear, caste, pedigree, honour and the rest; so these monks were taught to get rid of them little by little. After they were well grounded in meditation, they were asked to roam from one holy place to another, first in company of other Sadhus, and subsequently alone. Such was the method of training among the Nagas." About the election of the Mohant or the head of the Math, Sri Ramakrishna gave the following account as heard from his Guru:

"Whenever there was a vacancy they used to elect for the office one from among themselves whom they found to be a real Paramahamsa. Otherwise there was danger of going astray in handling wealth or in being the recipient of honours. So the one whom they found to be really above the temptation of money, was raised to this position. Such a man would spend the funds at his disposal in the service of God and the monastic members of the Order."

Totapuri was born with many good Samskaras.[1] He was possessed of a mind which was sincere, and he had implicit faith in the Guru. Not only was he blessed with the desire for freedom and the company of a sage, but he also utilised them fully, with the result that he gradually attained to the Nirvikalpa Samadhi. He does not seem to have ever suffered from the vagaries of a wayward mind, as is the case with ordinary men, but with faith in his own powers, advanced speedily towards the goal under the directions of his Guru. He believed in self-effort and self-reliance as the determining factors of a man's life. He could not realise the helpless state of a man who, unable to fight the vicious tendencies of his mind, gives way to them in despair. Nor did he believe in a higher power governing the destinies of mankind, without whose co-operation life becomes a Sisyphean task. His own experience gave him no inkling of this dark side of nature. Everything was for him smooth and plain sailing. All through life he carried to completion whatever he was determined to do, without invoking any outside aid. Naturally he laughed at the thought that the senses could lead a man astray and subject him to endless torment. He was supremely ignorant of the terrible power of Maya, the eternal and inseparable companion of Brahman, manipulating the universe exactly as She pleases. This lack in his experience was removed by coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna, from whom he learnt that Maya can never be ignored—that Maya and Brahman are really one. Before he left Dakshineswar he had to bow in reverence before this inscrutable power of the Lord and acknowledge its existence.

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[1] Impressions of past lives from the Oriental standpoint, or latent impressions in the subconscious mind, according to the Occidental idea.

A monist from youth, Totapuri could not appreciate the value of devotion as a means of spiritual progress, nor could he understand that it is a great help to concentration, making the devotee gradually forgo all personal and selfish considerations for the sake of the Beloved. He did not believe that true love could help a man to realise God and lead him to Advaita. Prayer, song, repetition of the Lord's name and the other auxiliaries of the path of devotion seemed to him quite meaningless. He even ridiculed the devotee's display of emotion. But he was not an atheist or a man devoid of attachment to God. Devotional songs by Sri Ramakrishna would bring tears to his eyes, though he did not understand their meaning. He liked the placid form of devotion known as the Shanta, but had no idea that God can be approached as master, friend, son or beloved, and that by worshipping Him in all these various ways a devotee can realise Him quickly. The yearning and importunity of a Bhakta, his sense of pride, the pangs of separation, the weeping, laughing, dancing and other expressions of his sentiments towards the Ishta, seemed to Totapuri to be nothing short of madness. He did not believe that by such processes a Bhakta could attain his goal. This often formed a lively topic of discussion between Totapuri and his gifted disciple.

From his youth Sri Ramakrishna used to utter at day-break and at dusk the various names of God accompaneid by the clapping of hands and sometimes ecstatic dancing. He would repeat aloud for some time, "Hari bol, Hari bol!"—"Hari is the Guru, and the Guru is Hari!"—"O Govinda, my life!"—"The mind is Krishna, the Prana is Krishna, knowledge is Krishna, meditation is Krishna, perception is Krishna, intellect is Krishna!"—"Thou art the universe, and the universe is in Thee!"—"I am the instrument and Thou art the operator!"—and so on. Even after his highest realisation he adhered to this practice. One day when the shadows were falling and he was engaged in a spiritual talk with Totapuri, Sri Ramakrishna began his usual chant of the Lord's names, at the same time clapping his hands. Totapuri was astonished to see a liberated soul like Sri Ramakrishna resorting to practices meant only for beginners. With a derisive smile he addressed the Master, " What! Are you preparing bread in that way?"[1] Sri Ramakrishna laughed and said, "Nonsense! I am taking the name of God, and you compare it to the making of bread! Shame!" Totpauri smiled at the reply, and thinking that there must be some meaning behind this act, did not protest further.

Another evening Sri Ramakrishna was seated with his Guru near his sacred fire. Both were absorbed in Vedantic discussion, when a servant belonging to the garden approached the fire to take a coal to light his hookah. Totapuri did not notice him at first, but when he saw the intruder he flew into a rage and began to abuse him for his sacrilegious act, even threatening to strike him with his tongs. "What a shame!" ejaculated Sri Ramakrishna again and again in a half-conscious mood, and rocking with laughter. "What makes you laugh? Was not the man exceedingly impertinent?"—interrupted Totapuri, rather astonished at the strange conduct of his disciple. Sri Ramakrishna replied with a smile, "Yes, but I was marking also the depth of your illumination! You were just now telling me that Brahman alone is real, and everything in the universe is Its manifestation. But the next moment you forget all and are about to beat a man! I laugh to see the irresistible power of Maya!" Totapuri became grave at these words. After a few minutes' silence he said, " Yes, you are right. I forgot everything in a fit of anger. Passion is indeed a dangerous enemy. I shall never give way to anger again." And he kept his word.

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[1] The allusion is to the practice among the up-country people of flattening small lumps of dough into thin cakes by patting them between the palms.

Talking of the inscrutable nature of Maya, Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Even Brahma feels miserable when he falls into the snare. You close your eyes and discriminate, 'There is no thorn, nothing to prick,' but as soon as your hand is hurt by a thorn, you cry out in pain. Similarly you may reason in your mind that there is no such thing as birth or death, virtue or vice, pain or misery, hunger or thirst—that you are the Eternal Brahman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute; but the moment there is some trouble with the body, or temptations overcome the mind, you forget all your high philosophy and are overwhelmed with delusion and its painful consequences." He used to illustrate this by the following parable: "Rama, Sita and Lakshmana are going through the woods. It is a narrow path where only one at a time can go. Rama is leading the way, bow and arrow in hand; Sita is following him; while Lakshmana is bringing up the rear with his bow and arrow. Lakshmana is intensely devoted to Rama and longs to see him constantly. But Sita is between and obstructing his view, and he is sore at heart. Sita is quick in detecting this, and moved with sympathy, she steps aside now and then saying, 'Look !' Then Lakshmana sees his beloved Lord. Similarly, between the Jiva and the Lord there is Maya —the Divine Mother. Unless She, moved by sympathy, steps aside, the Jiva can never see his Lord. So, however much you may discriminate, it is all to no purpose without Her help."

Totapuri did not understand this magic power of the Divine Mother, which for some forges endless chains, but for the fortunate few opens the gate of heaven. He himself had ever been an object of special favour with the Divine Mother. Through Her grace he was possessed of those qualities of head and heart which lifted him above the tribulations of life. Totapuri was not conscious of this. He could not realise that Her gracious hand was protecting him from all dangers and trials, and naturally he thought that he had acquired the highest knowledge by his own personal efforts. But the Divine Mother willed that he should know his real position, and provided an opportunity to show him this.

Endowed with an iron constitution, Totapuri was never troubled with complaints of the body. He had a good digestion and always enjoyed sound sleep. His mind, too, was full of bliss—the outcome of his realisation. But after a few months' stay in Bengal even his strong physique felt the enervating influence of the climate, and he became a victim to a virulent attack of dysentery. Day and night he felt an unbearable griping pain, which disturbed the concentration and the balance of his trained mind. From its absorption in Brahman it began to be diverted to the troubles of the body. Even before the attack he had felt that the climate was not suitable for him, and that he must move. But he could not persuade himself to forgo the blissful company of Sri Ramakrishna simply because of the body. The very idea was ridiculous, and besides the body could contract disease anywhere. And why should he care at all for this physical frame, the very nature of which was to suffer, decay, and ultimately die? Had he not realised once for all that he was the Soul and not the body? So why should he be afraid of death? With such arguments he silenced his mind and stayed on at Dakshineswar.

But as the symptoms of disease increased and the desire to quit Dakshineswar became stronger, something or other prevented him from bringing the subject up to Sri Ramakrishna and asking his permission to leave. Seeing that he was losing weight Sri Ramakrishna arranged a proper diet and medicines for him, but it was of no use. Then at his instance Mathur arranged for a regular treatment, but with no better result. In spite of all his trouble with the body, the Swami's mind was still disciplined enough to enter into Samadhi at will and forget all about the physical.

But on a particular night his pain became excruciating and he could get no relief. Then he tried to dissociate the mind from the body by concentrating it on Brahman. But before he could raise it to that level, it slipped back to the pain in the body. He tried again and again, but failed every time. Then he became disgusted with his body and thought, "Because of this wretched body, my mind is beyond control today. I know positively that I am not the body. So why should I associate myself with it and suffer its pain? What's the use of dragging it about? I shall sacrifice it in the Ganges and put an end to all my trouble." Thus determined, Totapuri carefully concentrated his mind on Brahman and slowly advanced into the water. But what was this! Was the Ganges really dry tonight? Or was it an illusion of his mind? He went on and on until he almost reached the other bank—yet the water was not deep enough to drown him! He caught a glimpse of the trees and houses on the bank, standing like shadows in the midst of the darkness. Bewildered he thought, "What a freak of Maya! There is not water enough in the river today to drown me! What a mysterious play of the Lord!" Suddenly a veil was lifted, as it were, from his mind's eye. A glorious vista of Divine Presence was unfolded before him. His intellect was dazzled before the flash of this revelation. On all sides he found the manifestation of the Divine Mother—the Omnipotent Mother of the universe! She was in the water, and She was on land. She was the body, and She was the mind. She was pain, and She was comfort. She was knowledge, and She was ignorance. She was life, and She was death. He found the Mother in everything that he saw, or heard, or thought, or imagined. She was turning Yea into Nay, and vice versa. No embodied being could go beyond Her jurisdiction unless She was pleased to let him go. He had not even the freedom to die! Again, beyond the body and mind also, it was She—the Mother, in Her Transcendent, Her Absolute aspect! She was the Brahman whom he had been worshipping all his life, and to whom he had been offering his heart's adoration! Brahman and Shakti were one and the same thing—the two aspects of the same Entity.

In that hour of solemn silence, Totapuri, with a heart full of devotion, realised the Immanence of the Mother in the universe and again and again, took Her holy name. With a loving heart he surrendered himself completely at Her feet and waded back to Dakshineswar. Though there was still pain in the body, it was not reflected in his mind. The joyous memory of the Revelation sent a thrill through his whole being. He took his accustomed seat by the fire and spent the remainder of the night in uttering the name of the Divine Mother and in meditating on Her.

Next morning, when Sri Ramakrishna came to inquire about the Swami's health, he found him altogether a different man. His face was beaming with joy, and the body seemed to be free from illness. He asked Sri Ramakrishna to sit by him, so that he might tell what had happened during the night. He said, "The disease has been a friend to me. Last night I was blessed with the vision of the Divine Mother and through Her grace have been freed from the disease. Oh, how profoundly ignorant I was! Well, now get me your Mother's permission to leave. I now understand that it was to teach me this lesson that She kept me here so long. Many a time did I think of leaving and actually went to you to bid you good-bye. But somebody always prevented me, as it were, whenever I tried to speak of it to you, and diverted me by introducing other topics!" Sri Ramakrishna smiled at this and said, "Ah, then you refused to believe in my Mother, and argued with me to disprove Her! Now you see that She is real. She taught me long ago that Brahman and Shakti are inseparable—like fire and its burning property."

The music from the concert-room was pouring forth its charming strains when the two saints left their seats to go to the temple of the Divine Mother. Both felt as they prostrated themselves before the Mother that She gave Her willing assent to the departure. A few days after, Totapuri took leave of Sri Ramakrishna and bade adieu to Dakshineswar.

The lesson which Totapuri learnt at Dakshineswar may be summed up in Sri Ramakrishna's words: "When the Supreme Being is thought of as inactive—not creating, sustaining, or destroying—I call Him Brahman or Purusha, the Impersonal God. When I think of Him as active—creating, sustaining, and destroying—I call him Shakti or Maya or Prakriti or the Personal God. But really the distinction between Brahman and Shakti—or Impersonal God and Personal God—is a distinction without a difference. The Impersonal and the Personal are one and the same Being even as milk and its whiteness. You cannot conceive the milk without the whiteness. They are one like a gem and its lustre. They are one like a snake and its zigzag movement. When you think of a snake, you automatically think of its zigzag motion also. Similar is the relation between Brahman and the Divine Mother."

The Bhairavi Brahmani, Sri Ramakrishna's guide in the Tantrika mode of worship, was present at Dakshineswar when the Master was initiated into Sannyasa. A devotee and follower of the dualistic form of worship, she could not appreciate the Advaita philosophy and its non-dualistic ideas, nor did she like the close intimacy of Sri Ramakrishna with Totapuri and even said to him, "Don't be so intimate with that monk. His method is dry intellectualism. You will lose your devotion and love for God if you associate with him." Needless to say that the Master paid no heed to these words and pursued his own course.

After Totapuri left Dakshineswar, the Master was determined to remain in a state of absolute indentity with Brahman far above all subjective and objective experiences. He directed his activities accordingly. Words cannot describe the state of his mind at this period. He was not conscious of his body and its requirements. In that state he lost all consciousness of "I and mine" or "thou and thine"—in fact, the very distinction between subject and object. There was neither one nor many—both were engulfed in the crowning realisation of the Absolute. He passed beyond the realm of relativity. To him there was neither bondage nor striving for freedom. He lived and moved and had his being in the glory of the ultimate truth. The urgings of the mind and senses were completely at rest. He remained in a state of Peace and Bliss—unspeakable, ineffable—a condition of supreme ecstasy in which there was no personality, and divinity alone remained. It was an Infinite Stillness in which Self communed with Self. Sri Ramạkrishna had reached the highest pinnacle of spiritual realisation, and all this without the least effort, for his pure mind was now habituated to dissociating itself from all finite things, which throw a veil, as it were, over the absolute majesty of Brahman—the One without a second. In that state he remained for six months. Referring to this period of his life the Master used to say, "For six months at a stretch I remained in that state whence ordinary men can never return—the body falling off after three weeks like a sere leaf. I was not conscious of day and night. Flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do in a dead body; but I did not feel them. The hair became matted with accretions of dust. There was no chance for the body to survive, and it would certainly have perished but for the kind ministrations of a monk who was present at Dakshineswar at the time. He realised the state of my mind and also understood that this body must be kept alive at any cost, as it was meant to be of immense good to the world. He, therefore, busily engaged himself in preserving this body. He would bring food regularly to me and try to bring my mind in various ways down to the consciousness of the relative world, even by beating me with a stick. As soon as he found me to be a little conscious, he would press some food into my mouth, only a bit of which reached the stomach; and there were days in which all his efforts would be in vain. Six months passed in this way. At last I received the Mother's command, 'Remain on the threshold of relative consciousness for the sake of humanity.' Then I was laid up with a terrible attack of dysentery. An excruciating pain in the stomach tortured me day and night. It went on for six months. Thus only did the mind gradually come down to a lower level and the consciousness of the body. I became a normal man. But before that at the slightest opportunity the mind would take a transcendental flight and merge in the Nirvikalpa Samadhi!"

About this time an incident happened in the family of Mathur which further strengthened his faith in Sri Ramakrishna. Jagadamba Dasi, Mathur's wife, contracted dysentery and the physicians declared her case to be hopeless. Mathur was greatly upset by this impending calamity. He hastened to Dakshineswar to seek the Master's counsel and aid. Sri Ramakrishna made him sit by his side and tenderly inquired into the cause of his grief. Mathur said with a sob, "Not only am I threatened with a terrible personal loss, but if the management of the estate passes into other hands, I shall be unable to continue my services to you." Sri Ramakrishna was touched to the quick at his sore plight and said in an ecstatic mood, "Don't be afraid, your wife will recover." These words reassured Mathur, and he returned home. To his great relief he found that the disease had suddenly taken a turn for the better, and the crisis was past. Referring to this incident, Sri Ramakrishna afterwards said, "From that day Jagadamba slowly advanced towards recovery, and the disease was transferred to this body (meaning himself). As a result of this cure I suffered for six months from dysentery and other complaints." Then he would add, "Was it for nothing that Mathur served me so faithfully for fourteen years? He could do so only because the Mother had shown him various miracles through this body."

Because of this and, perhaps, also on account of his supreme disregard of the body during his six months' absorption in the Nirvikalpa Samadhi, he fell a victim to dysentery. Mathur engaged Kaviraj Ganga Prasad Sen for his treatment. Hriday was in constant attendance upon him. But in spite of the disease, his mind was always full of peace and bliss. At the slightest suggestion it would forget the body and everything about the world and reach a transcendental plane where only the Atman remained. So he must have felt very little of his physical pain, which, however, often dragged him to the sense plane. Dakshineswar had at this time an influx of various Vedantist monks, with whom he used to discuss the highest philosophy. Needless to say, it would have been impossible for him to take part in these discussions, had he been overwhelmed by the disease like an ordinary person.

After six months, Sri Ramakrishna gradually recovered. His mind acquired the power to accommodate itself to the plane of relativity as well as to that of transcendentalism. As a result of the Advaita realisation it had acquired a wonderful breadth, accepting all forms of religion as so many ways of reaching perfection. An instance of this catholicity we find in his practice of the Mohammedan faith soon after his recovery from the dysentery. A man named Govinda Rai, who was originally a Kshatriya, but who, being attracted by the spirit of universal brotherhood obtaining in Islam, had embraced this faith, came to Dakshineswar at this time. He was a lover of God and probably followed the practices of the Sufi sect.[1] Rani Rasmani's charity had provided a place for all, and Govinda found a congenial atmosphere in the garden of Dakshineswar, where he took up his residence. His devotion soon attracted the notice of Sri Ramakrishna, who was charmed with his great faith and love for God. Gradually it came to him that, since Mohammedanism was also a means to the realisation of God, he would see how the Lord blessed the devotees who worshipped that way. He made up his mind to be initiated by Govinda.

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[1] A Mohammedan sect deeply influenced by the Vedanta.

Once the idea became fixed in his mind, there was no delaying its fulfilment. He intimated his desire to Govinda, who was glad to initiate him. To the practice of this new religion the Master applied himself with his characteristic thoroughness. Thus did he describe his mentality at this period: "Then I used to repeat the name of Allah, wear my cloth in the fashion of the Mohammedans and recite the Namaz regularly. All Hindu ideas being wholly banished from the mind, not only did I not salute the Hindu gods, but I had no inclination even to visit them. After three days I realised the goal of that form of devotion." First of all he saw a radiant Person with a long beard and of grave appearance; and then his mind, passing through the realisation of the Brahman with attributes, was finally absorbed in the Brahman without attributes.

Hriday used to say that during this practice Sri Ramakrishna was willing to eat Mohammedan food, and it was only at the earnest entreaty of Mathur that he desisted from it. Knowing that Sri Ramakrishna, with his childlike tenacity of purpose, would not be satisfied unless he could carry out some part at least of his desire, Mathur had various dishes prepared in the Mohammedan style by a Brahmin under the direction of a Mussalman, and gave them to the Master to take. During the practice of Islam he never stepped into the precincts of the temple, and lived in Mathur's quarters which were outside the temple compound.

Sri Ramakrishna's realisation in the Mohammedan form of practice appears to be fraught with far-reaching consequences for India. That he practised it after attaining perfection in the Advaita[1] makes it clear that only through this, the underlying basis of all faiths, can the Hindus and Mohammedans be united with each other. The Master was aware of the wide differences in views and temperament between these two rival faiths, but may we not infer from his successful practice of Mohammedanism that the existing barriers will one day be obliterated, and the two races clasp each other in amity and love? Time alone will prove the truth of our surmise.

Sri Ramakrishna was still very weak after the attack of dysentery, and it was thought that a change to his native village would be beneficial. Mathur and his wife supplied the necessary funds for the trip and undertook to see that the Master would be taken care of during his stay there. About the month of May in the year 1867 Sri Ramakrishna started for Kamarpukur, accompanied by Hriday and the Bhairavi Brahmani. His mother preferred not to leave the bank of the Ganges and remained at Dakshineswar under the care of Mathur.

It was eight years since Sri Ramakrishna had been in Kamarpukur. His relatives and friends were eagerly expecting him. They had heard all sorts of rumours about his strange behaviour—that sometimes he dressed himself as a woman and called out the name of Hari; at others he led a Sannyasin's life; and at still other times was a Mussalman repeating the name of Allah! All this made these simple village people anxious about his mental condition. But great was their relief when Sri Ramakrishna appeared in their midst. He was the same old Gadadhar—with his boyish frankness, his genial good humour, his extreme truthfulness, his whole-souled devotion that made him lose consciousness of the body in the name of God—all intact! Nay, there was something more. There was an extraordinary spiritual atmosphere about the young man which prevented too free approach, or discussion of worldly topics with him unless he chose. At the same time his very presence was enough to drive away all their mental troubles and discomforts, and bring to them joy and peace. Some strange influence attracted them to his side in large numbers to enjoy his saintly company. The house of Rameshwar was thronged with eager visitors of both sexes from early morning to late at night.

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[1] The philosophy that teaches: Truth is one; sages call it by various names.

The Master stayed at Kamarpukur for six or seven months. It was a great relaxation for him to enter into the joys and sorrows of the simple village-folk, after the stormy Sadhana at Dakshineswar. It became his endeavour to awaken these old friends, slowly and silently, to the real object of this life, and to teach them, in the midst of their daily occupations, the lessons of self-control and surrender to the will of God.

Among these he was surprised to find some really advanced souls who appreciated the depth of his spiritual realisations. The Master narrated the following incident. One day, after dinner, he was seated in his room, when some women of the village came to visit him. In the course of the religious talk that followed, he fell into a trance. As this was by no means an uncommon occurrence in his life, the visitors continued the conversation. Finally one of them asked her friends to keep quiet saying, "He is now swimming like a fish in the ocean of Brahman. Please don't disturb him in his enjoyment." Though not believing her, they became silent. On the Master's return to consciousness they asked him about it, and he said, "Yes, she was quite right. But I wonder how she could know about it." Those artless village-folk had a sincere affection for Sri Ramakrishna. Many of the women brought sweets for him. Those who were busy at home passed their leisure moments in his company.

Sarada Devi, his girl wife, was then staying with her father at Jayrambati. The last time she saw Sri Ramakrishna was when she was seven years old, and too young to understand her position. The only thing she remembered in connection with her husband's visit to Jayarambati was that his nephew Hriday had sought her out and made an offering of lotuses at her feet. Shortly after Sri Ramakrishna's arrival, she was sent for. The Master learned of it, but expressed no opinion. A girl of fourteen, Sarada Devi, or the Holy Mother, as she became known later to the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, arrived at Kamarpukur. Strictly speaking, this was her first meeting with her divine husband.

After a few days' stay, she understood his mental condition and was eager to serve him with all her love and devotion. She dedicated herself to him heart and soul, and looked to him for guidance and illumination, to which, as his wife and devoted pupil, she had a foremost claim. Of a pure and spotless heart, she rejoiced that she was bound to this God-man by an indissoluble tie. The Master willingly shouldered his new responsibility and began to train her. He remembered his Guru's words on finding that he was a married man: "What does it matter? He alone is firmly established in the knowledge of Brahman, who can keep intact his renunciation and discrimination even while living with his wife. He alone has attained the supreme illumination who can look upon man and woman alike as Atman and deal with them accordingly. A man with an idea of the distinction of sex may be a good Sadhaka, but he is still far from his goal." Here was a chance for Sri Ramakrishna to test his realisations. By allowing his wife the rightful privileges of her position, he subjected himself to an ordeal from which he emerged brighter than ever.

It was a characteristic of Sri Ramakrishna that once he thought it his duty to do a thing, he could not procrastinate or leave it half-finished. The training of his wife in secular as well as spiritual matters was whole-hearted. He took special care that she had an all-round training in the discharge of her household duties, in making good use of money, and above all, in behaving according to circumstances relying solely upon God. How far this teaching, by precept and example, was successful, we shall come to know. Suffice it to say that the Holy Mother was charmed with the ideal of pure and selfless love that was shown to her by her saintly husband; she was content to worship him as her Ishtadeva and by following in his footsteps to develop her own character.

The Bhairavi Brahmani lived on intimate terms with the family of Rameshwar and was respected by everybody. Though she was highly advanced spiritually, she had not yet attained perfection. This was the reason she tried to dissuade the Master from practising the Advaita under the guidance of Totapuri. She had not reached the state of a Divya Sâdhikâ, which is the highest grade among the Tantrika worshippers, nor was she above such petty feelings as anger or jealousy. She could not bear to see Sri Ramakrishna associate with any other devotee or teacher. It was rather strange that a devotee of the Brahmani's stamp should have such traits. She knew that Sri Ramakrishna's love and respect were not subject to the ebb and flow of the ordinary man's—they were abiding. But she did not understand that a love which fails to give liberty is selfish. True love not only has a permanent hold on the beloved's heart, but strikes off the fetters from the feet of lover and beloved as well and even brings about the realisation of God!

By degrees the Brahmani yielded to a sense of false pride. As the spiritual teacher of Sri Ramakrishna, she came to consider herself a supremely important personage whom everybody must obey or be accursed. She did not take kindly to the idea of Sri Ramakrishna's doing his duty by his wife. Perhaps she feared this would endanger his celibate life. But the Master would not listen to her remonstrances. This not only mortified her, but inflamed her egoism, in consequence of which she disregarded him for some time. If any one, after discussing a spiritual topic in her presence, wished to refer to Sri Ramakrishna, she would declare in a passion, "Why should you speak to him on the matter? Wasn't it I who opened his eyes?" She grew very peevish, and with or without provocation rebuked the ladies of the house. Sri Ramakrishna remained unruffled and revered her as much as ever. Under his instructions the Holy Mother looked upon her as her own mother-in-law, served her with great love and respect, and meekly submitted to her in everything.

Excessive pride clouds our vision and makes us commit mistakes at every step. The Brahmani, despite her attainments, could not control herself. One day she picked a quarrel with Hriday over nothing, and the matter could only be settled through the intervention of some of the Master's relatives. The Brahmani at first was greatly humiliated, but on reflection she perceived her mistakes and hung her head in shame. She saw not only that it was inadvisable to remain longer in this family, but that her attachment to the Master was a golden chain which she must snap. In her changed attitude towards him she realised that she alone was to blame, and her remorse was keen. A few days after this, she approached Sri Ramakrishna with sandal-paste and garlands of flowers which she had taken great pains to prepare, and with these adorned him as an Incarnation of Sri Gauranga. She implored his forgiveness and bade farewell to Kamarpukur. She had lived six years with Sri Ramakrishna. The lesson she derived from her contact with him was not to be forgotten. Through it she attained a higher plane, and her remaining days were spent in a more vigorous search for truth.

While in Kamarpukur, Sri Ramakrishna now and then paid visits to Sihore, the native place of Hriday. Hriday invited well-known Vaishnava devotees to meet and hold religious discourses with the Master. His mother, Hemangini Devi, revered Sri Ramakrishna as her Chosen Deity and regularly worshipped his feet with flowers. One day she prayed for the boon of dying in the sacred city of Banaras. The Master in a state of exaltation granted it, and she actually died in Banaras, retaining her consciousness to the last.

After a stay at Kamarpukur Sri Ramakrishna regained his former health and returned with Hriday to Dakshineswar. Near Burdwan, where he was to take the train, he saw in a rice field a species of tiny plants, the flowers and leaves of which are said to be very pleasing to the Lord Shiva. He was at once seized with a desire to worship the Lord with them and, though it was not particularly clean, he sat on the ground to meditate, putting some of the leaves and flowers on his own head. He soon was plunged into a deep trance, with no thought of the journey. Finding the train-time near and the Master in that helpless condition, Hriday ministered to him and taking him up in his arms reached the station just in time to catch the train. The Master used to say that a Sadhaka can realise God only when he is above the distinction between cleanliness and uncleanliness. In this instance he demonstrated this precept.

GLIMPSES OF MATHUR

"Hriday, my wife, children, wealth, position, and everything is unreal, and Ramakrishna alone is real." In these terms Mathur expressed his deep veneration for his great Master. We have seen how he gradually surrendered himself to Sri Ramakrishna and looked to him for guidance. We know of one of the Master's visits to his Jaun Bazar house on the occasion of the Durga Puja. We shall narrate some interesting events that took place on another such occasion. As usual, Mathur heartily enjoyed the three days of the Puja in the company of Sri Ramakrishna. When the Vijayâ Dashami or the day for immersion of the image in the Ganges arrived, everybody was sad at heart at the thought of the impending separation from the Mother. But Mathur was still under the joyous influence of the three preceding days, and it was a rude shock to him when the priest sent him word to come and make his parting salutation to the Mother, as the time for the immersion ceremony was near at hand. To immerse the Mother in the Ganges! How could he have the heart to do that! It was impossible! So he gave no reply and sat overwhelmed with grief. To the priest's repeated reminders he replied, "No, I can't allow the image to be moved. The Mother shall be worshipped here regularly, and anybody interfering will do so at his peril." Everybody was surprised. The persuasion of the elders had no effect. Mathur clung to his resolve. The news, greatly magnified, at last reached his wife. In her perplexity she went to Sri Ramakrishna, her last refuge; and told him the whole story. The Master went to see Mathur and found him pacing the room excitedly. "Father," he said to Sri Ramakrishna as soon as he saw him, "whatever others may say, I can never allow the Mother to be consigned to the Ganges. I have told them that She shall be worshipped here regularly. Life would be unbearable without Mother!" Sri Ramakrishna stroked Mathur's chest and said, "Oh, is this what makes you afraid? But who tells you that you will have to live without the Mother? And where would She go even if you consign the image to the Ganges? Can the Mother stay away from Her son? The last three days She has accepted your worship outside, in your hall, but henceforth She will be much closer to you and accept your worship, being constantly present in your heart!"

That magic touch and those pregnant words restored Mathur's composure. Did he feel the radiant presence of the Mother in his heart? Who knows? But he gave his consent to the immersion of the image. Like a real Guru, Sri Ramakrishna lifted his disciple's mind by a touch to a higher plane of consciousness where there was no further need for the external symbol. This marvellous power of the touch was observed again and again in the Master's subsequent dealings with his obstinate disciples at Dakshineswar and elsewhere. What hours of argument could not do, a single touch would accomplish in a second. He explained that when he touched the disciple, the impurities of the mind would be removed, and truth would flash before his purified vision.

The following incident will illustrate Mathur's deep faith in the Master. Once he was bed-ridden at his Jaun Bazar house, with an abscess of a serious type. He was anxious to see Sri Ramakrishna and sent repeated messages to him to come. The Master complied with the request, and came and stood by his bedside. With great difficulty Mathur sat up and asked for the dust of his feet. "What will you do with that," said the Master, "will that cure your abscess?" Mathur replied, "For the abscess there is the doctor. But I want the blessings of my Saviour on the eve of my departure from this world." Sri Ramakrishna immediately fell into a trance, and Mathur, with tears flowing from his eyes, reverently placed his head at the Master's feet. He recovered in a short time.

Sri Ramakrishna's gracious attitude to Mathur was not only maintained throughout the latter's lifetime, but was also extended to his heir. One day he said in an ecstatic mood to Mathur, "I shall remain here as long as you live." Mathur started in apprehension, for he wished the privilege of association with Sri Ramakrishna for his son Dwarika. So he said, "Why, Father, Dwâri, too, reveres you." "All right," said the Master, "I shall be at Dakshineswar as long as he lives." As a matter of fact, he left Dakshineswar only after the death of Dwarika Nath.

Just as Mathur confided everything to Sri Ramakrishna, so he, too, except when in Samadhi, consulted Mathur on all matters and sought his advice or opinion like a boy. The relation between them was one of mutual trust and dependence. During as well as after his Sadhana, the Master would inform Mathur whenever he was in need of anything. He would tell of his extraordinary visions to Mathur and ask his opinion. On the other hand he took care to see that Mathur's wealth was usefully spent. All this kindness, no less than his childlike simplicty and helplessness under the normal conditions, completely won over Mathur, who took upon himself the task of protecting Sri Ramakrishna. Finding in him a combination of omniscience with the innocence of a child, Mathur concluded that Sri Ramakrishna's body was to be his care, just as in the subtle spiritual domain he himself was protected by the Master. Mathur's love for Sri Ramakrishna, therefore, assumed a complex character, for in his transcendental states Sri Ramakrishna was the object of his worship, and in the latter's childlike moods Mathur was the comforter.

Nevertheless, it was to Sri Ramakrishna that Mathur would turn when in difficulties. Once he permitted some of his folowers to fight those of a rival zemindar, and some men were killed. Finding, himself in danger of the law, Mathur hastened to Sri Ramakrishna and implored his protection. The Master at first took him to task saying, "You rogue, every day you make trouble and come to me for help! What can I do? Go and bear the consequences of your own deeds. How can I help you?" But at the continued importunity of Mathur he said at length, "Go your way. It will be as the Mother wills." Mathur escaped arrest.

Living in the company of Sri Ramakrishna and seeing him so often in the state of Bhava-Samadhi, Mathur was determined to taste that bliss for himself. He was thoroughly convinced that Sri Ramakrishna could perform any miracle at his mere wish, for had he not given ample proof that he was God incarnate? He prayed to the Master for the experience of Bhava-Samadhi. Sri Ramakrishna gave his usual reply, "Wait, wait. In the fulness of time you will experience it by yourself. You are all right, as you are enjoying both secular and spiritual joy. But once you have attained that state, you won't be able to look after your estate, and everything will go to pieces." Mathur was not convinced. The Master then fell back upon his last resource in such cases and said, "Well, I shall ask Mother about it. She will do what She thinks best." A few days after Mathur actually experienced Bhava-Samadhi in his Jaun Bazar house. He could no longer look after his estate. He sang, laughed, danced, or burst into tears without any reason. Unable to divine the cause of this change in him, his relatives, taking it to be some disease, consulted physicians. But treatment proved futile, and all were anxious. At last Mathur said to them, "I am neither insane nor anything of the kind. Don't be anxious, send for Sri Ramakrishna, and everything will be all right." The Master came. Referring to this incident he would say, "I was sent for. On arriving there I found him in a strange condition. His eyes were red, and tears ran down his cheeks as he spoke of God. There was a tremor in his chest. He clung to my feet and said in a spirit of remorse, 'I crave your forgiveness, Father. For the last three days I have been in this state. In spite of my best efforts, I cannot turn my mind to business, and everything is topsy-turvy. Be pleased to take back your Bhava, I don't want it any more.' 'Why,' I said, 'it was you who demanded it?' 'Yes,' said he, 'and I feel its joy too. But if I remain like this, the estate goes to ruin. It is a state that is fit for you and not for me. So please take it back.' I smiled and said, 'I told you so before. But you did not listen to me.' 'Quite true' replied Mathur, 'but how could I know then that it would possess me like a ghost, and that I would not be able to extricate myself when I wished?' I passed my hands over his chest, and he became calm."

Spiritual states require training of the aspirant to make him able to bear their brunt. He must be pure and free from selfish desires. Otherwise these states do not last, or bring about terrific reactions. The seeker after truth cannot be too careful about the necessary preparations.

Mathur cherished a desire to make some permanent provision for Sri Ramakrishna. But he was foiled in his object by the Master's supreme spirit of renuncaition. When Chandra Devi was at Dakshineswar, he thought there was an opportunity to fulfil his desire. So one day he pressed her to ask of him anything she wanted. This perplexed the old lady, for she wanted nothing. She said to him, "My son, you have already removed all my wants. I shall inform you if I require anything in future. I have enough clothing, and you have amply provided for my food. So what more can I want?" Mathur still insisted on her accepting something from him. Chandra Devi thought a moment and then said, "Well, if you must give something, buy for me an anna[1] worth of tobacco leaves. I want to make a tooth-powder." Mathur was moved to tears at this ideal contentment. He saluted her as he said to himself, "Who but such a mother could give birth to a son like Sri Ramakrishna?"

Sri Ramakrishna visited two devotees in company of Mathur. One of them was the famous Devendra Nath Tagore, the founder of the Âdi Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta. The Master said to Mathur, "I have heard that Devendra Nath Tagore meditates on God. I would like to visit him." Mathur and Devendra Nath were class-mates in the Hindu (now Presidency) College, Calcutta. So Mathur felt free to call without a special invitation. One day the party, including Hriday, visited Mr. Tagore. Mathur introduced the Master to his friend, who received him cordially. To determine how far Tagore's body bespoke spirituality, the Master asked him to bare it. When he tucked up his shirt, it showed a crimson glow on his fair chest. Referring to this visit, the Master said later, "When I first met him he appeared to be a bit proud—naturally enough, for he enjoyed wealth, learning, honour, and prestige, to an uncommon degree. With that in mind I addressed Mathur, 'Well what is the genesis of egoism? Is it due to knowledge or ignorance? Can a man who has realised the Brahman be proud of his learning, wisdom or riches?' I was talking with Devendra, when suddenly I was seized with that peculiar state of mind in which I can see through a person. Then even scholars seem as mere straw, unless I find them endowed with discrimination and renunciation. Laughter swelled within me. I found him to be both enjoying the world and leading a religious life. He had many children, all young. So in spite of his being a great Jnâni, he had to reconcile himself to the world. I said to him, 'You are the king Janaka of this age. Janaka both enjoyed the world and attained the highest realisation. I heard that you have your mind fixed on God though you are in the world, so I have come to see you. Tell me something about Him.' Devendra recited some passages from the Vedas. 'This world,' he said, 'is like a chandelier, of which every creature is a bulb.' While meditating in the Panchavati I, too, had a similar vision. Finding his statement tallying with my experience, I thought he must be a very great man. I asked him to explain it. He said, 'Who can know this world? God has created man to proclaim His glory. If there be no lights in the chandelier everything is in darkness; one can't see the chandelier even.' We talked a long time. He was pleased and invited me to attend their Anniversary. 'That depends upon the Lord,' I said, 'you see my condition. There's no knowing in what state He will put me at any particular time.' 'No, you must come,' he said, 'but please come dressed in Dhoti and Chaddar. It will pain me if anybody criticises you for being shabbily dressed.' I said, 'That is impossible. I can't be dressed like a Babu.' At this statement of mine Devendra, Mathur, and all laughed. Next day Mathur received a letter from Devendra cancelling the engagement, on the plea that it would not be genteel for me to appear in the meeting without a covering for the body!"

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[1] Equivalent to three cents.

The other devotee was Dina Nath Mukherjee, who lived at Baghbazar, Calcutta. This visit was a disappointment, for, on that day, Mukherjee's son was being invested with the holy thread. The house was very small and already crowded with visitors who had come to be present at the ceremony, so there was neither room nor leisure for Mukherjee to entertain Sri Ramakrishna and his party. After a brief talk Sri Ramakrishna left.

PILGRIMAGE

Mathur and his wife arranged for a pilgrimage to Northern India and wanted Sri Ramakrishna to accompany them. At their earnest request the Master consented[1] to be one of the party, which numbered about one hundred and twenty-five, including Hriday. One second class and three third class cars were reserved, with an arrangement to detach them at any station between Howrah and Moghal Sarai. The party started on January 27, 1868. They halted for a few days at Deoghar to visit the shrine of Vaidyanâth. Here an interesting thing happened. One day, while passing through a neighbouring village, Sri Ramakrishna was greatly distressed to see the wretched condition of its people. Moved with sympathy for them, he said to Mathur, "You are the steward of the Mother. Feed these poor people and give every one a piece of cloth." Mathur at first hesitated saying, "This pilgrimage will cost a lot of money, and these people are very numerous. We may be short of funds on the journey if we try to feed and clothe them. So what do you say to this, Father?" But Sri Ramakrishna was inexorable. He shed tears at the sight of such abject misery and said in anguish, "Fie upon you! I am not going to Banaras. I prefer to remain with these helpless people." Like a petulant child he left Mathur's company and sat with the poor villagers. At the sight of his compassion, Mathur was much moved and ordered bales of cloth from Calcutta to distribute among them, and he fed them as well. Sri Ramakrishna then cheerfully started for Banaras.

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[1] We have it on reliable authority that he had gone on pilgrimage once before about the year 1863. His mother was then of the party. They went up to Allahabad.

At a wayside station near Moghal Sarai Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday alighted from the train, and it went off without them. Mathur was extremely anxious and from the next station wired to the Station-Master to send them by the following train. He arranged for a conveyance for Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday and with a depressed heart proceeded towards Banaras. Fortunately, another train conveying Babu Râjendra Lâl Banerjee of Calcutta, a distinguished railway official, came along just then. He saw the sad plight of the Master and Hriday, took them into his carriage and dropped them off at Moghal Sarai.

Sri Ramakrishna arrived within sight of Banaras, the holiest city of India, a place immortalised in its scriptures as the Eternal City of Shiva. As he approached Banaras by boat across the Ganges, he had a strange vision. The holy city actually appeared to him—as the sacred books declare—to be made of gold. It seemed as if the precious thoughts of countless monks and devotees had accumulated there, making the place an abode of the gods; the real Banaras was spiritual, while the external, material one was but its shadow. He was deeply impressed by this glorious vision and for the first few days was scrupulous about maintaining the purity of the place, going outside its spiritual boundary, the stream Asi, for acts likely to defile its sanctity.

Mathur engaged a couple of houses near the Kedârghât. He lived at Banaras in royal style. Whenever he went out, he was surrounded by a number of liveried men who carried his silver umbrella and other paraphernalia. Sri Ramakrishna could not walk; so he was carried in a palanquin. One day Mathur with Sri Ramakrishna visited a zemindar at Banaras. Naturally his parlour was filled with men who discussed worldly matters. Sri Ramakrishna was pained at this and complained to the Divine Mother, "Where hast Thou brought me, Mother? I was far better at Dakshineswar. There I used to have spiritual conversations only, but here people indulge in all sorts of worldly talk."

The very first act of Mathur at Banaras was to give doles of food to scholars. He also invited them and their families to his home, fed them and gave to each a piece of cloth and a rupee in cash. Sri Ramakrishna, with Hriday as attendant, used to visit the shrine of Vishwanâth, the presiding Detiy of the place, almost daily. He would fall into a trance even on the way, as well as in the presence of the Deity. It is said that his Samadhi was deepest at the temple of Kedarnath.

He also went to visit the noted monks of Banaras. With Mathur he visited a monastery of the Nânakpanthis and was pleased with their great devotion. Another day he paid a visit to the famous Trailanga Swami, who was then under a vow of silence. The Swami beckoned him to take a seat and held out his snuff-box to him as a mark of welcome. Referring to this visit the Master afterwards said, "I found in him the living manifestation of Vishwanath. Banaras was sanctified by his presence. He was in a state of the highest consciousness, with no idea of the body. He lay cheerfully on the scorching sand. I asked him by a sign if God was one or many. He replied by gestures that God is one when seen in a state of Samadhi, but when looked at through the prism of relative consciousness, He is many. Pointing to him I said to Hriday, 'This is the state of a real Paramahamsa'." Trailanga

Swami was then constructing a bathing ghat near the Manikarnikâ. At the instance of Sri Ramakrishna Hriday dug a few spadefuls of earth for the work, which pleased the Swami greatly. The Master invited him one day to the home of Mathur and entertained him with great respect.

Sri Ramakrishna had a wonderful vision at Banaras, which he often related to his disciples. Mathur used to take him by boat to visit the shrines on the Ganges. On this particular day the boat was gliding past the Manikarnika, where, amid columns of smoke, many dead bodies were being cremated. As soon as the Master came upon the scene, he became wild with joy, and hastening to the edge of the boat was lost in Samadhi! The priest who was acting as a guide and the boatmen stepped forward to prevent him from falling into the river. But they had not to do anything,—he stood there perfectly motionless, a divine smile lighting up his countenance, Mathur and Hriday standing by in readiness to help if he should lose his balance. Some minutes passed in this way, and the Master began to come back to normal consciousness. Then they performed the religious rites for which they had come, and returned home. Sri Ramakrishna then told of his vision to all, "I saw a tall figure with a white body and twany matted locks staidly approach each funeral pyre, and tenderly lifting up the Jiva, breathe into its ears the Supreme Mantra! The Gracious Mother of the Universe, seated on the other side of the pyre, was removing one after another all the coverings of bondage of every Jiva, and unlocking the gate of Nirvâna was speeding the fortunate soul to the Absolute. Thus the realisation of Advaita which people attain after ages of concentration and austerity, was brought within the easy reach of those who died at Banaras, through the infinite mercy of Shiva." Everyone was astonished to hear this recital, and the learned scholars who accompanied Mathur remarked, "We learn from the *Kâshikhanda*[1] that Shiva confers Nirvana on those who die at Banaras; but it is not explicitly stated how. Your vision makes it quite clear. It is strange that your realisations outdo even the scriptural records."

After about a week's stay at Banaras the party moved on to Allahabad, where all bathed in the sacred confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna. Mathur and others, observing the tradition of the place, shaved their heads, but Sri Ramakrishna refrained from doing so, saying that it was not necessary for him. After three days the party returned to Banaras.

At the end of a fortnight Mathur and his party went to Vrindaban. A house near the Nidhuvan was taken. As in Banaras, he lived in princely style. Sri Ramakrishna was in high spirits in this sacred place, rich in the countless sweet memories of Sri Krishna. He visited the places of interest with characteristic emotions. The following is his description of some of his experiences: "At the sight of Banku Vihâri[2] I was overwhelmed with emotions and ran to embrace him. I was not so impressed by Govindaji. The very sight of the Kâliya Daman Ghat[3] used to throw me into ecstasy, and Hriday used to bathe me like a child. I would take a stroll in the evening on the sandy beach of the Jumna, where there were small thatched huts among the jujube trees. One evening I saw herds of cows returning from their pasture. Followed by cowherd boys they waded the Jumna. The scene at once suggested Sri Krishna to me, and overwhelmed with emotion I ran crying wildly, 'Where is Krishna, oh, where is Krishna!' I had a desire to visit Shyâm Kund and Radha Kund.[1] They sent me in a palanquin. It was a long distance; so they provided refreshments for the way. I got down to visit the Govardhan hill. The very sight of it overwhelmed me, and I ran to the top, where I stood lost to outward consciousness. The inhabitants of the place brought me to normal. On the way to Shyam Kund and Radha Kund I saw the old meadows and trees and plants, and birds and deer—rich with associations—and could not contain myself. Tears rolled from my eyes and wet my cloth. I thought, 'O Krishna, everything hallowed with Thy association is there, only I can't see Thee!' I was in the palanquin, but had not the power to utter a syllable and could not ask the bearers to stop. Hriday was following and had warned them to be very careful. At Shyam Kund and Radha Kund I found that the Sadhus had made something like thatched huts, in which they were practising devotional exercises with their back to the door lest their eyes see people outside."

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[1] A section of the *Skanda-Purana*.

[2] A name of Sri Krishna. The temple also is called after Him.

[3] Which Sri Krishna freed from the ravages of a terrible snake named Kaliya.

At Vrindaban he visited Gangâ Mâtâ, a Vaishnava woman devotee, noted for her great spiritual realisations. She was looked upon as an intimate attendant of Sri Radha reincarnated to teach people the secret of divine love. About sixty years old, she had spent the greater part of her life in the village of Barshânâ, the birthplace of Radhika. At the very first sight she understood the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna, and considered herself blessed to have met him. Sri Ramakrishna was charmed with her piety and devotion. We reproduce here the Master's own description of her and of his association with her: "Ganga Mâi used to take great care of me. She was very old and lived all alone in a hut near Nidhuvan. Seeing my condition and loss of consciousness in Samadhi, she often said, 'This is verily Radha reincarnated in flesh and blood!' She used to address me as Dulâli.[1] When I was in her company I forgot all about food and drink, or returning to my quarters. On some days Hriday would bring food to her hut and feed me. Ganga Mai, too, used to prepare various things for me. She had frequent trances, which attracted crowds. I had no desire to leave her; so it was settled that I should remain. I was to take parboiled rice.[2] Ganga Mai was to have her bed at one end of the room and I at the other. It was arranged in every detail. Then Hriday said, 'You are so subject to stomach complaints, who will look after you?' 'Why,' said Ganga Mai, 'I will look after him. I will serve him.' Well, here was Hriday pulling me by one hand and Ganga Mai by the other. At this moment I was reminded of my mother, who was living alone in the concert-room of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. I thought, 'Who will look after her if I remain in Vrindaban?' This decided me. I said, 'No, I must go'." He expressed to Hriday his high opinion of this remarkable devotee.

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[1] Two sacred tanks several miles off Mathura.

At Vrindaban Sri Ramakrishna adopted the Vaishnava dress, which he wore for a fortnight. He visited Mathura also, where, he said, at the very sight of the Dhruva Ghat he had a vision of Vasudeva crossing the Jumna with his babe Krishna in his arms.

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[1] A pet name for Sri Radha.

[2] Not sunned rice, as he had a weak stomach.

The Master returned with Mathur's party to Banaras, after staying at Vrindaban for about a fortnight. At Banaras he met the Bhairavi Brahmani, his teacher in the practice of the Tantras. She was living at one of the Ghats with another old woman, also a pious soul. Sri Ramakrishna went to see her several times and was pleased at the devotion of her companion. The Master advised the Brahmani to stay at Banaras till the end of her life. She passed away shortly after.

At Banaras Sri Ramakrishna had a great desire to listen to the music of the Vinâ. Fortunately there was an expert in the Madanpurâ quarter named Mahesh Chandra Sarkâr. The Master waived all ceremony, went to his house and requested him to play for him. Mahesh Chandra gladly consented. The first notes had scarcely fallen on his ears, when Sri Ramakrishna went into Samadhi. Half regaining consciousness, he prayed to the Divine Mother, "Don't take away my consciousness, Mother. I wish to enjoy the Vina." After that he retained consciousness and enjoyed the music, to which he sometimes joined voice. Three hours were spent in this way, when after light refreshments he turned home. After that Mahesh came to Mathur's every day to see the Master.

Mathur stayed at Banaras till May to witness a special decoration of Vishwanath. On his return jouney he had a mind to visit Gaya. But Sri Ramakrishna declined to go there, and he had to give up the project. The Master thought that if he once visited that sacred place, his mind would leave the physical plane for ever. He knew of his father's vision at Gaya before his birth, and was convinced that his mind would become permanently absorbed in God there. He considered himself an instrument in the hand of the Mother, and bowed to

Her decree that his body should remain in the world to carry out Her divine purpose. Accordingly the party returned to Calcutta direct.

From Vrindaban the Master had brought a handful of sacred dust, part of which he sprinkled in the Panchavati; the rest of it he buried in the little cottage where he had practised Sadhana, and said, "Now this place is as sacred as Vrindaban." Shortly after, at his request, Mathur fed a large number of Vaishnavas and gave them money.

HRIDAY RAM AND AKSHAY

We have seen Hriday as the faithful attendant of Sri Ramakrishna from the beginning of his Sadhana. He was a matter-of-fact man, with no place in his heart for sentiment. The ideal of his life was to advance the interests of his little family and to be as comfortable as possible. Constant association with Sri Ramakrishna, at times, generated in his mind ideas of a different nature, yet they were very feeble and shortlived. Whenever there was any chance to satisfy his desire for enjoyment, Hriday would run after it. It was due to this that he failed to see the significance of the wonderful experiences through which Sri Ramakrishna passed before his very eyes during the eventful years at Dakshineswar. But through his genuine love for his uncle and his desire to make him happy and comfortable he developed courage, intelligence, and practical wisdom. So far as the religious life was concerned, he thought there would be time enough for that later on, when his family would have been established in life, and increasing years would dull his desire for pleasure. At this juncture, his wife died, and his whole outlook on life changed. The pleasures of the world lost their savour, and he yearned for God. He began to worship the Divine Mother, meditated now and then, casting off his cloth and holy thread, as he had seen Sri Ramakrishna do, and insisted that the power be given him to realise the higher truths. He thought that as Sri Ramakrishna was so well pleased with his services, he had only to ask to have the glorious results of spiritual practice conferred upon him. The Master told him that he would gain everything by simply serving him, and that everything would be in a muddle if both of them forgot all about the body in their absorption in thoughts of God, since there would be nobody to look after their creature comforts. But Hriday was not to be dissuaded. So the Master was constrained to say, "All right, let Mother's will be done. My wish is of no avail. It was She who revolutionised my mind and made me pass through all those stages of realisation. If She wills, you, too, shall have them."

A few days after, Hriday began to have visions and even fell now and then into states of semi-consciousness during meditation or at worship. Questioned by Mathur about it, the Master said, "Hriday is not feigning these states. He earnestly prayed to Mother to have some visions, and this is the result. She will soon cure him." "No, Father," replied Mathur with a smile, "I am sure it is all your work. Now please bring him down to the normal state, so that we may both serve you. These spiritual states are not for us."

One evening shortly after this, Sri Ramakrishna was going towards the Panchavati. Hriday, thinking he might need his help, followed him. Suddenly he saw a strange sight. His uncle's ordinary, human body disappeared, to be replaced by a luminous one, the effulgence of which radiated in all directions. The shining feet did not touch the earth at all. Hriday rubbed his eyes again and again to make sure that it was not a hallucination. He looked about him. The Ganges, the trees, the buildings, and the temples were as usual. The change was in his uncle. Amazed, he looked at himself, suspecting that there might be a change in him as well! He was startled to find that he, too, possessed a luminous body—as if, being the eternal attendant of the divine being before him, he had been a part of his essence and assumed a separate form in order to serve him! The revelation overwhelmed him with joy, and forgetting himself, the world, and its opinions, he shouted frantically again and again, "O Ramakrishna, O Ramakrishna, we are not men—why are we here? Come, let us go from place to place and save people from their misery. You and I are of one stuff!" "Hush," said Sri Ramakrishna, stopping short at the noise, "what has happened to us that you howl like that? People will gather about thinking something is wrong." But Hriday would not stop. Hastening to him Sri Ramakrishna touched his chest and prayed, "Mother, stupefy this fool!" Immediately all joy left Hriday, and he found himself hurled back to his normal state, shorn of his glory like a fallen angel. He was very much mortified and wept as he said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Oh, what have you done uncle! Why do you condemn me to this state? I shall no more have that ineffable joy." "I do not mean you to be dulled for ever," replied the Master by way of consolation, "I only wished that you might be quiet now. I had to do it, as you raised such a storm over a trifling vision. I see countless visions at all hours of the day, but do I make a fuss over them? You are not yet fit to see them. Keep quiet now, you will see many more when the time comes."

Hriday became quiet for the time being, but his feelings were hurt. He resolved by intensified effort to see similar visions again. He spent many hours in prayer and meditation. One night he decided to pray to the Mother in the place where Sri Ramakrishna formerly meditated. At dead of night he left his bed, went to the Panchavati, and sat to meditate on Sri Ramakrishna's seat. Shortly after, the Master felt drawn to go there too. When he arrived, he heard Hriday crying piteously, "Save me, uncle, I am going to be burned!" Sri Ramakrishna hastened to the spot and asked him what the trouble was. "No sooner did I sit here to meditate," replied Hriday, writhing in agony, "than I felt as if someone had emptied a tray of live charcoal over me. Oh, the pain is unbearable!" The Master gently stroked his body and said, "You will feel all right again. But tell me, what makes you do these things? Didn't I tell you that you will gain everything by serving me?" Hriday used to say that Sri Ramakrishna's touch removed all pain from his body then and there. Convinced that it would be well for him not to run counter to the wishes of his uncle, he did not use the Panchavati for meditation again.

Though Hriday had faith in Sri Ramakrishna's words, his old duties were becoming distasteful to him. He was on the look-out for new and exciting occupations. It was the autumn of 1868, and he wished to celebrate the Durga Puja at his own home. The Master approved and Mathur helped him with money. Hriday was keen upon taking Sri Ramakrishna with him, but Mathur objected. He wanted the Master to be present at the Puja in his home. Sri Ramakrishna consoled Hriday saying, "Don't grieve, Hriday. I shall be there in a subtle body every day to watch your worship. You alone will see me. Get another Brahmin to read out the Mantras to you and conduct the worship in your own fashion. Don't fast altogether, but take milk and Ganges water, at noon, with some candy syrup. If you follow my advice, depend upon it the Divine Mother will accept your worship." The Master also gave him specific instructions as to who should mould the image, who should act as the assisting priest, and how everything was to be done. Hriday went home with a joyous heart. During the three days of worship he was astonished to see his uncle standing in a shining body by the side of the image. He returned shortly afterwards and told Sri Ramakrishna of what had happened, at which the latter said, "Yes, at the time of the evening service and again at the Sandhi Puja time, I was really eager to watch your worship. In the trance that followed, I felt myself carried to your chapel, in a shining body, along a luminous tract." The Master, in an ecstatic mood, once told Hriday that he would celebrate the Durga Puja thrice. It happened as he said, for Hriday failed in his attempt to celebrate it for the fourth time. Shortly after the first year's celebration, he married a second time and again devoted himself to the worship of Kali and the service of his uncle in the Dakshineswar temple.

The reader is already aware that Sri Ramakrishna had a nephew named Akshay, who was the only son of his brother Ramkumar, and a general favourite in the family. Sri Ramakrishna loved the boy and during his Kamarpukur days often carried him in his arms. As the years passed Akshay grew into a handsome boy. His father, however, had a premonition that the boy would not live long. So he never took him in his arms or caressed him.[1] Akshay was yet a child when Sri Ramakrishna left Kamarpukur and passed through the tempest of Sadhana at Dakshineswar. When Haladhari vacated his office of priest in the Vishnu temple at Dakshineswar, Akshay at the age of seventeen stepped into his place. From his very boyhood he had a special devotion to Sri Ramachandra and spent hours in worshipping Him. At Dakshineswar he was in his element. While worshipping Radha Kanta, he would become so much absorbed in meditation that he was unconscious of the presence of spectators. He also spent much time in the worship of Shiva and in reading the *Bhagavata*. This was his regular routine for years. He sometimes practised so hard that blood would spurt from his throat and palate. His sincere faith and devotion endeared him to Sri Ramakrishna.

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[1] Lest he should become too much attached to him.

Shortly after his marriage in 1869, Akshay became seriously ill. On his return to Dakshineswar he had a relapse. The physicians said it was a simple case, but when the fever showed no signs of abating after the first three or four days, the Master said to Hriday, "The doctors have made a mistake. It is a case of typhoid. Consult good physicians for your satisfaction, but the boy won't recover." "God forbid, uncle," said Hriday, "how can you utter such ominous words?" Sri Ramakrishna simply replied, "I don't say these things voluntarily. It is the Mother who makes me speak like that. Do you think I wish Akshay to die?" Hriday was greatly perplexed. He did his utmost for the recovery of the boy. But the illness was gradually aggravated. When the fatal moment arrived, Sri Ramakrishna stood by Akshay's bed and bade him utter the name of Rama. Akshay did so thrice and expired. The event made no impression upon the Master at the time. Rather, in exaltation of spirits he laughed as Hriday wept. The following is his account of the event: "Akshay died before my very eyes. But it did not affect me in the least. I stood by and watched a man die. It was like a sword being drawn from its scabbard. I enjoyed the scene, and laughed and song and danced over it. They removed the body and cremated it. But the next day as I stood there (pointing to the south-eastern verandah of his room), I felt a racking pain for the loss of Akshay, as if somebody were squeezing my heart like a wet towel! I wondered and thought that Mother was teaching me a lesson. I was not much concerned with the body even—much less with a nephew. But if such was my pain at his bereavement, how much more must be the grief of the householders at the loss of their near and dear ones!"

DEATH OF MATHUR

Shortly after the death of Akshay, Mathur took Sri Ramakrishna with him on a tour through his zemindary, perhaps to divert his mind. Hriday was also one of the party. The first noteworthy incident took place at an exceptionally poor village where, as at Vaidyanath, the Master was deeply touched by the miserable condition of its inhabitants. At his passionate appeal Mathur fed the starving people and gave every one a piece of cloth. During this excursion Mathur visited his own village in the Khulnâ District, and lived for some weeks at the home of the family Guru, where Sri Ramakrishna was cordially received. The party then returned to Dakshineswar.

At Colootollah, in Calcutta, at the house of Kalinath Dutta, a number of devotees of the Vaishnava sect were in the habit of assembling for Sankirtana or the recitation of sacred texts. A seat, decorated with flowers and garlands, was kept sacred to Sri Chaitanya, who was their Chosen Ideal; it was called "Sri Chaitanya's seat." It was sincerely believed that he occupied it in a subtle form and blessed the ceremonies. One day, at the invitation of the brotherhood, Sri Ramakrishna with Hriday went there. A recitation from the *Bhagavata* was going on, to which the audience was listening attentively, when Sri Ramakrishna entered the room and quietly took his seat. The Master was overpowered with emotion as he listened to the soul-stirring verses of the sacred book. He ran and stood on Sri Chaitanya's seat, absorbed in deep Samadhi, with no vestige of life in his body. His hands were raised as one sees them in the picture of Sri Chaitanya and a seraphic smile played about his lips. The devotees, perceiving that he was in Samadhi, above all barriers of time, place, and circumstance, were caught up in the enchantment of the hour. The reader and the audience riveted their eyes on Sri Ramakrishna. Even the most bigoted dared not protest against his seemingly sacrilegious act. In the ecstasy of joy all shouted the name of Hari and commenced a Sankirtana. The music acted upon Sri Ramakrishna's subconscious mind, and he gradually came down to the consciousness of the objective world. He joined in the Sankirtana with his usual fervour, now dancing in an extremely graceful way, and again standing still lost in divine emotion. After some time the Sankirtana came to a close amid joyous shouts of the Lord's name, and Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar.

After his departure there set in a reaction in the minds of the devotees. Some of them criticised Sri Ramakrishna's action, while others justified it. They wrangled for a time, but no conclusion was reached. Now there lived at Kâlnâ, in the district of Burdwan, a great Vaishnava saint, named Bhagavân Dâs Bâbâji, who was honoured throughout Bengal for his spirituality. He was over eighty, and devotees from far and near flocked to him and sought his counsel on disputed matters of spiritual import. The members of the Colootollah congregation consulted him about this occurrence. Bhagavan Das was greatly annoyed to hear that the sacred seat of Sri Chaitanya, his Chosen Deity, had been desecrated by a man whom nobody knew. He criticised the action sharply and suggested precautions against a repetition of the offence. Needless to say, Sri Ramakrishna knew nothing of all this.

Soon after the incident, in the year 1870, Sri Ramakrishna set out by boat with Mathur and Hriday to Nadia, the birth-place of Sri Chaitanya. On the way they touched at Kalna to see Bhagavan Das Babaji. Arriving there in the morning, Mathur busied himself in arranging for lodgings, while Sri Ramakrishna went with Hriday to visit the Babaji. It was frequently observed that the Master, like a child, felt shy and diffident at first in the presence of distinguished strangers. Such was now the case. He sent Hriday ahead and followed him at a short distance, covering himself with a sheet. The Babaji had already had a premonition that a great saint must have arrived, and had expressed himself to that effect. Seeing that no one but Hriday had come, he resumed his conversation about a Vaishnava who had been guilty of some misdeed, and ordered his expulsion from the sect. As Hriday at this point said to him with a bow, "My uncle, who becomes overpowered with emotion at the mere mention of the name of God, has come to pay his respects to you," Sri Ramakrishna entered the room and humbly took a seat to one side, after saluting him. His face was almost veiled from view. The Babaji returned Sri Ramakrishna's salute and exchanged a few words with him about where he lived etc., etc. Seeing Bhagavan Das telling his beads Hriday said, "Sir, why do you tell your beads? You are a man of realisation, and need do so no longer." The Babaji answered, "I may not require it myself, but I keep up the practice as an example to others. Otherwise they might go astray in trying to imitate me."

Sri Ramakrishna could contain himself no longer. Depending entirely like a child upon the Divine Mother, his spirit of resignation was so complete and so natural that not only did he do nothing on his own initiative, but the sight of others doing or saying things from an egotistic standpoint was extremely painful to him. Even in ordinary conversation he seldom spoke of himself in the first person except as a servant of God. So these egotistic words of Bhagavan Das irritated him greatly. He stood up and said, "What! You dare to think like that! You pose as a teacher! You will expel a man from the society! You continue or give up a religious practice at will! Who are you to teach men? You dare not teach the world unless He who is its Lord and Ruler allows you to do so." The sheet had fallen from his body, even the wearing cloth had dropped and a halo appeared about his face. As he finished speaking, overwhelmed with emotion he fell into Samadhi! All gazed spellbound at his majestic figure, and none dared to utter a word. The Babaji, who was accustomed to being addressed with respect, was surprised at this sudden outburst, but the irresistible authority with which the words were spoken went straight to his heart; his eyes were opened to his mistake. He realised that he was nothing but a humble servant of the Lord—a mere instrument in His hands. Far from being resentful he studied the Master closely and was charmed with the unmistakable marks of spiritual greatness in him. In the conversation that followed, Sri Ramakrishna went into frequent trances, and the Babaji's judgement was confirmed. And when he found that this was the man who had occupied the sacred seat of Sri Chaitanya at Colootollah, he regretted his criticism and asked pardon. Sri Ramakrishna recounted the whole incident to Mathur, praising the realisations of the Babaji at the same time. Mathur also went to visit the Babaji and gave money to the Ashrama for a feast.

From Kalna the party proceeded to Nadia. When the boat passed by the sand-banks close to the town, Sri Ramakrishna was beside himself with emotion, and Hriday had to hold him fast lest he should fall into the Ganges. He was calm again when the boat touched land. Curiously enough, in the town he experienced no exaltation of feeling—a sure index to him of its spiritual worth—although he visited one temple after another. He was disappointed at the lack of divinity manifested there. After finishing his rounds he returned to his boat and went a short distance off shore. Suddenly a wonderful vision greeted his eyes. He used to say, "Two boys,[1] bright as molten gold, with aureoles round their heads, rushed smiling towards me through the air with uplifted hands. 'They come, they come,' I cried. In the twinkling of an eye they came and entered into this body (meaning himself), and I fell down unconscious. I would have fallen into the water but for Hriday, who caught hold of me." Being asked about it by Mathur, he said that old Nadia, the real birthplace of Sri Gauranga, had been engulfed by the river, and that those sand-banks marked its ancient site. This was the reason for his exaltation there, instead of in the town.[2]

It was now sixteen years since Mathur had first met Sri Ramakrishna. A wonderful change was wrought in his mind during this time. In the month of July, 1871, Mathur was suddenly taken down with typhoid fever. From the beginning Sri Ramakrishna knew that this was to be the end for Mathur—that the Divine Mother was going to take him back to Her bosom. Though he did not go himself to see him, Sri Ramakrishna sent Hriday every day to make inquiries. The fateful day arrived; Mathur was taken over to Kalighat.

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[1] Meaning Sri Chaitanya and Nityânanda.

[2] Subsequent research seems to corroborate this view.

That day the Master did not send Hriday, but fell into a deep trance, which lasted two or three hours. The form remained at Dakshineswar, but the spirit flew to the devotee's side to bless his last moments. After 5 o'clock Sri Ramakrishna regained outward consciousness and called Hriday to him. "Well," he said, "Mathur's soul has ascended to the Deviloka, or the sphere of the Mother!" Hriday was silent. Late at night the news reached Dakshineswar that Mathur had passed away at 5 p.m.

One day a devotee, interested in the Master's account of Mathur's wonderful personality and unique relationship with him, asked in curiosity, "Sir, what became of him after death? He won't have to be born again, will he?" The Master replied, "Perhaps he has been born again as a prince. He had hankerings for enjoyment." He spoke of something else, letting the matter drop.

With the death of Mathur there passed away a figure closely associated with Sri Ramakrishna during the most eventful epoch of his life. The closeness of their relationship must have been pre-ordained, for evidently Mathur's mission was to look after the Mother's beloved Child; and we have seen how faithfully he discharged this sacred task. With his passing, Sri Ramakrishna's life took a new direction; and a new group, to whom we shall presently introduce our readers, came on the stage.

THE HOLY MOTHER AT DAKSHINESWAR

The last that we saw of the Holy Mother was at Kamarpukur, under the tutelage of Sri Ramakrishna. This holy association filled the pure-hearted girl with unspeakable delight. Referring to this joy she said later on, "I used to feel always as if a pitcher full of bliss were placed in my heart—the joy was ineffable." When, a few months later, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar, she went back to her father's home, the happiest girl in the world. As a result of this inward bliss her character was completely transformed. She became more gentle, more thoughtful, and more unselfish, developing an unbounded love for all creatures. She was the very embodiment of kindness. Physical discomforts or unkind treatment were powerless to ruffle the serenity of her mind. She passed her days at Jayrambati, ungrudgingly serving her relatives, though her heart was at Dakshineswar, at the feet of the Master. Much as she would have liked at times to see him and to be near him, she consoled herself with the thought that he would call her to his side at the right moment. With this conviction Sarada Devi held herself in readiness.

Four years passed, and she was now a young woman of eighteen. Poised as she was, by reason of her inward bliss, above the ordinary joys and sorrows of the world, still she was not deaf to the idle gossip of the people of her village about her saintly husband, whom they described as mad. To them there was no other epithet applicable to a man who, regardless of all physical comfort, passed his entire time in chanting the name of the Lord. Some of her companions looked upon her with pity or scorn as the wife of a mad man. Though she patiently bore these inflictions, her heart was lacerated, and she would think, "Is it true that he is insane? Is he no longer the man I knew at Kamarpukur? If indeed matters have come to such a pass, then I must not be separated from him any longer. I should be at his side to serve him to the best of my ability." After much thought she decided to go to Dakshineswar to see for herself. An opportunity to do so soon presented itself.

During the Dol Purnimâ festival people from distant places come to bathe in the sacred waters of the Ganges. Some distant relatives of Sarada Devi resolved to go to Calcutta for this purpose. She begged leave to accompany them. The ladies thought it wise to speak about it to her father. He was quick enough to understand his daughter's real motive in going to Calcutta, and arranged to accompany her himself. As there was no railway and a palanquin was too costly for them, there was no alternative but to travel the distance of sixty miles on foot. They set out on the appointed day and walked on and on, the beautiful scenery helping to relieve the tedium of the journey. For two or three days all went well. Then, to the mortification of Sarada Devi, she fell ill of a high fever, and it became imperative to interrupt the journey and to stop at an inn. But comfort came to her in a vision. She said afterwards, "As I lay unconscious with fever, I saw an exceptionally lovely young girl of dark complexion sitting beside me. She passed her cool and tender hands over my body, taking away most of the burning sensation. 'Where do you come from?' I asked. 'From Dakshineswar,' she replied. 'From Dakshineswar!' I said in surprise, 'I long to go there—to meet him and serve him. But this fever has upset everything.' 'Why,' said the girl, 'you shall go to Dakshineswar when you get well, and meet him. I have kept him there for your sake.' I said, 'You are so kind! Who are you pray?' 'I am your sister,' she replied. I said, 'Ah, that's why you have come.' After this conversation I fell asleep."

Next morning Ram Chandra found that his daughter was free from fever, and the journey was resumed. After going a short distance they came across a palanquin, which they engaged and reached Dakshineswar at 9 o'clock at night (March, 1872).

Sri Ramakrishna was much disturbed at seeing Sarada Devi in such a weakened condition. He arranged for a separate bed for her in his own room, and said again and again with regret, "Ah, you have come too late—my Mathur is no longer here to look after you!" But with the good treatment and nursing under the personal supervision of the Master, she recovered in three or four days. He then sent her to live with his mother in the concert-room.

Convinced after a few days' stay at Dakshineswar that Sri Ramakrishna was unchanged in his attitude towards her, Sarada Devi decided to remain and give herself over to the service of Sri Ramakrishna and his mother. Thereupon her father returned to his home, rejoicing in the thought that his daughter was happy with her husband.

Sri Ramakrishna now resumed his old task of teaching his wife, testing at the same time his own realisations and discharging his duties as a husband. Those who move through the world wholly dependent on the will of the Lord, have no plans ahead; they wait and watch for guidance in everything they do. Hence they neither court any test nor shirk it when it comes. When Sri Ramakrishna took upon himself the task of training his wife at Kamarpukur, it was because it seemed to be the right thing to be done at the time. His departure for Dakshineswar was but an interruption. Now he took up the work again at the point where he had left off. His teaching covered a wide range of subjects from housekeeping to the knowledge of Brahman. Not content with mere instructions, he took particular care to see that she carried out his injunctions, lovingly correcting any mistake.

One of the important lessons he gave to Sarada Devi at this time was: "God is everybody's beloved, just as the moon is dear to every child. Everyone has an equal right to pray to Him. Out of His grace He manifests Himself to all who call upon Him. You, too, will see Him if you but call upon Him."

Some months after the Holy Mother's arrival, there arose a curious desire in Sri Ramakrishna's mind, which he lost no time in gratifying. It was the new moon of May, 1872, an auspicious night for the worship of Kali, and Sri Ramakrishna made special arrangements for it in his own room, instructing the Holy Mother to be present. She went there at 9 P.M. Sri Ramakrishna took the seat of the priest. After the preliminaries were over, he beckoned the Holy Mother to the seat which was reserved for the Goddess. Sarada Devi was in a semi-conscious state as she reverently watched the proceedings, and like one under a hypnotic spell, took the seat as she was told. Sri Ramakrishna with the help of an assistant, went through the regular form of worship, in which the Holy Mother took the place of the Deity. During the ceremony she went into Samadhi. The Master, too, when he had finished the Mantras, went into the superconscious state. Priest and Goddess were joined in a trascendental union in the Self. Hours passed. At dead of night the Master partially recovered consciousness; then with the appropriate Mantra he surrendered himself and the fruits of his lifelong Sadhana, together with his rosary, at the feet of the Holy Mother and saluted her.

With this sacred ceremony, called in the Tantras the *Shorhashi* Puja or the worship of the Woman, was finished the long series of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practices. It was the consummation of his Sadhana, in which he dedicated his all to the Mother of the universe, manifested through the living symbol of Sarada Devi. To his illumined vision everything in the universe became the symbol of God. His sweeping glance encompassed both Absolute and Manifestation, so that like the Rishi of the Upanishad he might say, "Thou art the woman, and Thou art the man. Thou art the boy, and Thou art the girl. Thou art the old man tottering on his crutches. Thou pervadest the universe, born in multiple forms."

The Holy Mother continued to live at Dakshineswar, enjoying the Master's divine company. The following are her reminiscences of those blissful days: "I have no words to describe my wonderful exaltation of spirit as I watched him in different states. Under the influence of divine emotion he would sometimes talk on abstruse subjects, sometimes laugh, sometimes weep, and again become perfectly motionless in Samadhi! This would continue throughout the night. There was such an extraordinary Divine Presence in him that I used to shake with fear, and wonder how the night would pass. I understood little of trances then. One day, finding his Samadhi would not break, I was terribly afraid, and wept and sent for Hriday. He came and uttered the Lord's name in his ear for some time before he could bring him back to consciousness! Then, finding that I suffered, the Master himself taught me to utter such and such names of the Lord when particular kinds of trance set in, or such and such Mantras when there were other symptoms. After this I had less fear, for he would regain consciousness when those methods were adopted. Months passed in this way. Then one day he discovered that I had to keep awake the whole night lest he should go into Samadhi—for it might come on at any moment—and asked me to sleep in the concert-room." She used to say that in those days the Master taught her everything—beginning with such details of domestic life as how a lamp was to be trimmed, how she was to behave with the different members of her family according to their different natures, and how she should conduct herself while visiting, up to the highest spiritual subjects such as prayer, chanting of the Lord's name, meditation, Samadhi, and even realisation of the Brahman. How different from the married life of the ordinary man! One stands in awe before such a lofty example.

One day Sarada Devi, as she was massaging the Master's feet, asked him, "What do you think of me?" Quick came the answer, "The Mother who is worshipped in the temple is the mother who has given birth to this body and is now living in the concert-room, and She again is massaging my feet at this moment. Verily I always look upon you as the visible representation of the Blissful Mother." One day, finding his wife asleep by his side, Sri Ramakrishna thus said to himself, "Here is a woman's body which the world holds so dear. But he who takes pleasure in it is confined to the body and cannot realise God. Tell me frankly whether you want this or God. If the former, then here it is." His purified mind answered this searching question by merging in a Samadhi so deep that it lasted the night. Next morning, after considerable difficulty, he was brought back to consciousness by the repetition of the Lord's name in his ear.

Months passed in this way, but not once did the minds of this divine couple come down to the plane of sense. This was possible, because both husband and wife had their minds attuned to the Infinite. Sri Ramakrishna complimented Sarada Devi in unequivocal terms. He used to say, "After marriage I anxiously prayed to the Divine Mother to root out all sense of physical enjoyment from her mind. That my prayer had been granted, I knew from my contact with her during this period."

When even after the lapse of a year or more Sri Ramakrishna felt not the least trace of body-idea in his mind, and continued to look upon Sarada Devi sometimes as the manifestation of the Divine Mother and sometimes as the Atman or Brahman, he understood that the Mother had brought him successfully through the ordeal, and that, through Her grace his mind was able to remain without any effort on his part on the highest plane of spiritual realisation. He felt that the grace of the Divine Mother had brought him to the end of his Sadhanas, and his mind was so absorbed in Her lotus feet that no thought entered in it, consciously or unconsciously, that was contrary to Her will.

The Holy Mother returned to Kamarpukur about the month of November, 1873, after staying a year and eight months with her husband.

AT THE END OF HIS SADHANA

About a year later, Sri Ramakrishna, through his contact with Shambhu Charan Mallik of Calcutta, who among other scriptures was acquainted with the Bible, decided to realise the Divine Mother by a new method, viz Christianity. Shambhu was well known for his generosity. He had a garden close to the Dakshineswar Kali temple, which Sri Ramakrishna frequently visited. In the course of the intimacy which thus grew up, Shambhu came to regard Sri Ramakrishna with sincere love and esteem, and after Mathur's death it was he who came forward to serve the Master and gladly supplied all his wants. He addressed Sri Ramakrishna as "Guruji" or teacher. The Master would sometimes resent this saying, "Who is a Guru and to whom? You are my Guru." But Sambhu would not give in and persisted in using the epithet till the end. Though not a Christain, he used to read the Bible to Sri Ramakrishna, who thus came to know about Christ and Christianity. So when the desire to realise the Christian ideal arose in his mind, the Divine Mother fulfilled it in a strange way, without any struggle on his part. One day the Master was in the parlour of the garden-house of Jadu Nath Mallik at Dakshineswar, on the walls of which were many beautiful portraits, one of them being Christ's. Sri Ramakrishna was looking attentively at the picture of the Madonna with the Divine Child and reflecting on the wonderful life of Christ, when he felt as though the picture had become animated, and that rays of light were emanating from the figures of Mary and Christ, and entering deep that it lasted the night. Next morning, after considerable difficulty, he was brought back to consciousness by the repetition of the Lord's name in his ear.

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Then the Son of Man embraced Sri Ramakrishna and became merged in him. The Master lost outward consciousness in Samadhi, realising his union with the Brahman with attributes. After some time he came back to the normal plane. Thus was Sri Ramakrishna convinced that Jesus Christ was an Incarnation of the Lord.

Long after, in discussing Christ with his disciples who were able to speak English, he asked, "Well, you have read the Bible. Tell me what it says about the features of Christ. What did he look like?" They answered, "We have not seen this particularly mentioned anywhere in the Bible. But Jesus was born among the Jews; so he must have been fair, with large eyes and an aquiline nose." Sri Ramakrishna only remarked, "But I saw his nose was a little flat—who knows why!" Not attaching much importance to these words at the time, the disciples, after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, heard that there were three descriptions extant of Christ's features, and one of these actually described him as flat-nosed!

It will be worth while to note here Sri Ramakrishna's opinion of Buddha and other great founders of religion. About Buddha he shared the general notion of the Hindus that he was an Incarnation of God. He used to offer him his sincere devotion and worship, and believed that in the holy triad at the temple of Jagannâth it was the Lord Buddha's personality that was still worshipped. He had a great regard for the sacramental food of Jagannath, which, like the water of the Ganges, he considered as supremely purifying. Hearing about the toleration of all religions in the temple at Puri, he was at one time eager to go there, but knowing the possibility of his body succumbing to the shock of associations which the place was sure to hold for him—for one Incarnation, Sri Chaitanya, had passed away there—he refrained from going. On another occasion he remarked, "There is not the least doubt about Lord Buddha's being an Incarnation. There is no difference between his doctrines and those of the Vedic Jnânakânda." We have every reason to believe that he spoke thus because of his supernatural insight.

About the Tirthankaras who founded the Jain religion, and the ten Sikh Gurus, Sri Ramakrishna heard a good deal in his later life from the lips of representatives of those communities, and came to entertain a great regard for them. In his room at Dakshineswar there were a small statue of Tirthankara Mahâvira and a portrait of Christ, before which incense was burnt morning and evening. But he was never heard to speak of the Tirthankaras or the Sikh Gurus as Incarnations of God. Of the latter he used to say, "They are all incarnations of the saintly king Janaka. I have heard it said by the Sikhs that just before attaining liberation he was possessed with the idea of doing good to the world. So he was born successively as the ten Gurus of the Sikhs, and after founding the Sikh religion was united for ever with the Supreme Brahman. There is no reason to disbelieve this."

In the state of Divine communion at the end of all his Sadhanas there came to him many intuitive perceptions, some of which were in relation to himself, others in connection with spirituality in general. Though these revelations were the outcome of his supersensuous perception, yet we may try to express them in terms of human reasoning.

About himself he came to the following conclusions:

First, that he was an Incarnation of God, a specially commissioned personage, whose spiriutal achievements were for the benefit of others. Comparing his own life with that of the usual seeker after truth, he was convinced of the great gulf that lay between. He saw that the ordinary aspirant, after a lifelong struggle, was satisfied with realisation of any one aspect of the Lord, whereas he could not rest till he had realised Him in all. He was aware that it took him an incredibly short time to attain realisation of any particular phase. That could not but mean that there was some peculiarity in his mental constitution which made it relatively easy for him to attain the supreme spiritual level. He was forced to acknowledge that he was exceptional; that his extraordinary spiritual struggle and realisations were not for himself, but to usher in a new era of spiritual unfoldment and to show mankind how to overcome the obstacles on the way to realisation.

Secondly, he knew that he had always been a free soul; that the various Sadhanas through which he had passed were not really necessary for him as they were for others. So the term Mukti or liberation was not applicable to him. From another angle, liberation was equally impossible for him, for just so long as there were beings who considered themselves bound, the Incarnation would have to come and show them the way out of their bondage. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "A zemindar's officer will have to run to any part of the estate where there is trouble." He used to tell his disciples that next time he would have to reincarnate himself *there* (pointing to the north-west). Some of these disciples, among whom was the great actor-dramatist, Girish Chandra Ghosh, of Bengal, have said that the Master also gave a hint as to the time this would occur, saying, "Two hundred years later I shall have to go there. Then many will be liberated, and those who will fail then, will have to wait for a long time!"

Thirdly, he came to foresee the time of his passing. One day, in an ecstatic mood, he spoke of it thus to the Holy Mother: "When you find me taking the food touched by a non-Brahmin, passing nights in Calcutta, and feeding another and eating the remnants—then know that the day for my leaving this body is near at hand." These words of the Master were literally fulfilled.

Another day, also in an ecstatic mood at Dakshineswar, he said to the Holy Mother, "Towards the end I shall take nothing but liquid milk preparations." This statement, too, came true.

About spiritual matters in general the following were his convictions:

First, as the result of his realisation through all forms of discipline, he was firmly convinced that all religions were true—that every doctrinal system represented a path to God. The demonstration of this seems to be the special object of Sri Ramakrishna's advent into the world. He was the first Incarnation who, so far as history goes, went through all the different varieties of religious practices in order to prove that fact. If universality be the touchstone of greatness, Sri Ramakrishna stands conspicuous among the Great Ones.

Secondly, the three great systems of thought known as Dualism, Qualified Monism, and Monism—Dvaita, Vishishtâdvaita, and Advaita—he perceived to be but different stages in man's progress towards the Goal. He held that they were not contradictory, but complementary, being suited to different mental outlooks. The far-reaching consequences of this realisation will be patent upon reflection to all. Every student of religion knows what a storm of conflicting opinions has been raised among scholars over these progressive systems. Not perceiving their underlying harmony, every sect has tried interpretation from one point of view, to the exclusion of the other two, with the result that philosophical discussions have become a bugbear to some, or driven others in despair to agnosticism or atheism. Hence the need of a prophet who by personal realisation of the inner significance of all of them would remove misunderstanding. The following are some of his statements:

"The Advaita is the last word in Realisation. It is something to be felt in Samadhi, for it transcends mind and speech."

"The mind and intellect can comprehend and put in terms of language the range of thought up to the Vishishtadvaita and no further. In its perfection, the Absolute and Manifestation are seen to be equally real—the Lord's name, His abode, and He Himself are found to be composed of the one spiritual substance. Everything is spiritual, the variance being only in form."

"For the ordinary man with strong attachment to the senses, the dualistic forms of religion, in which are embodied some amount of material support, like music and symbols, are useful."

As to action and inaction he had to say, "A man whose mind is absolutely pure naturally goes beyond action. He cannot work even if he tries to, or the Lord does not allow him to work. Just as when a young wife is going to be a mother, she is given less and less work to do; and when the child is born, she gives up household work altogether and is busied exclusively with the child. But the ordinary man must try to do his duties unattached, depending on the Lord, like the maidservant who does everything for her master, but knows in her heart that her home is elsewhere. This is known as Karma-Yoga. One should as far as possible take the name of the Lord and meditate on Him, while discharging one's everyday duties in an unattached way."

Thirdly, Sri Ramakrishna realised the Mother's wish that through him She would found a new Order, comprising those who would uphold the universal doctrines illustrated in his life.

Lastly, his spiritual insight told him that those who were having their last birth—those who had sincerely called on the Lord at least once—must come to him. The reader is at liberty to take this statement in a universal sense, or in a more personal way, as he chooses.

BEREAVEMENTS

At this time Rameshwar, who was the head and financial support of the Chatterji family, passed away at Kamarpukur, where he had gone to rest and recuperate, leaving two sons and a daughter. Rameshwar was prepared for the end, for he had been warned before he left Dakshineswar by Sri Ramakrishna that he would never return. According to his wishes, his body was cremated on the road-side, so that his ashes might be touched by the feet of devout passers-by.

Rameshwar possessed a royal heart which could never say "nay" to any Sannyasin or Fakir. He even gave away the utensils of the house, for it was his profound belief that no man who had the welfare of others at heart could ever suffer from want. Naturally he was widely mourned. His son Râmlâl succeeded him at the Dakshineswar temple.

When the sad news reached Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna became greatly concerned for his aged mother. Chandra Devi was very old and had suffered many bereavements, and this new shock might be too much for her. He prayed to the goddess in the Kali temple to sustain his mother in this affliction. Then he went to her with tears in his eyes and broke the sad news to her. He was agreeably surprised to find that she took it quite calmly, remarking, "This world is unreal. Everybody must die some day or other. So it is useless to mourn." He saw that in response to his prayer the Divine Mother had pitched her mind to a high key, and he thanked Her again for Her kindness and for freeing him from anxiety.

The Holy Mother came to Dakshineswar for the second time probably in April, 1874. She made the trip in the company of a party of women pilgrims from her village, who wished to bathe in the Ganges at Calcutta during a coming eclipse. She gradually fell behind, because she was unable to walk fast. She told the rest not to wait for her, but to go on to Târakeswar, where she would rejoin them the next day. The way led through extensive waste lands, notorious for dacoits. Evening was closing in, and the Holy Mother was becoming nervous and wondering what to do, when she saw a tall, dark man, with a long stick approaching at a rapid pace. She was much alarmed at first, thinking he might be a bandit, but when he came up to her, and she explained her predicament, he offered his protection and that of his wife who was following him, and escorted her to a neighbouring shop. The next morning he and his wife accompanied her to Tarakeswar, where she rejoined the rest of the party. The Holy Mother was filled with gratitude for their kindness, called them her father and mother, and made them promise to come to see her at Dakshineswar. They kept their word and visited the Holy Mother a number of times at the temple garden, where they met Sri Ramakrishna, who treated them with much kindness.

At Dakshineswar she lived in her old quarters, the concert-room, with her mother-in-law. It was too small for two persons, and Shambhu Charan built a hut for her on a piece of land adjacent to the Kali temple. Captain Vishwanâth Upâdhyâya—another devotee, of whom we shall presently speak—supplied the necessary timber. The Holy Mother moved to her new hut, where she had a maidservant to assist her. Every day she cooked Sri Ramakrishna's food and brought it to him in the temple. The Master used to spend some time there every day. Only once because of heavy rain did he stay overnight. After a severe attack of dysentery she returned to Jayrambati, probably in September, 1875. Shortly after, she had a severe relapse, and her condition became critical. Sri Ramakrishna was grieved to hear of this and said to Hriday, "Well, Hriday, what if she should die without attaining the object of human life?" In her extremity Sarada Devi, on the advice of her brother, Umesh, went to the temple of the local goddess, Simhavâhini, and lay there without food, determined to end her life if she were not cured. A few hours later she and her mother were told of and given some medicines which cured her in a few days.

A few months after the Holy Mother's departure from Dakshineswar, an important event took place in the Kali temple. It was the passing of Chandra Devi in March, 1876, on the fortieth birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. She was very old, and for some time age had robbed her of much of her physical and mental powers, though she still retained her spiritual force. Hriday gave the following account of her death. One day he was about to start for his native village, when he felt a strange hesitation, as if the shadow of some approaching danger was upon him. He spoke of it to Sri Ramakrishna, who advised him not to go. Three days passed quietly. Every day Sri Ramakrishna spent some time with his mother and tended to her wants. On the fourth evening he paid his usual visit to her and remained with her till midnight, and left her fairly well. Next morning her door remained closed till 8 o'clock, which was unusual. The maidservant called out, but got no response; putting her ear to the door, she was frightened to hear stertorous breathing. She ran to inform Sri Ramakrishna and Hriday. The latter hastened to the spot, opened the door, and found the old lady unconscious. Minute quantities of milk and Ganges water kept her alive for three days. When her last moments arrived she was taken to the brink of the Ganges. Sri Ramakrishna made an offering of flowers at her feet, and her soul quietly passed away. Being a Sannyasin, he did not perform the funeral rites; these, as well as the "Shraddha" ceremony, were performed by his nephew, Ramlal. Later Sri Ramakrishna had a desire to make oblations of water (Tarpana) to his mother, as did other sons, but his fingers became stiff and separated, so that all the water ran out. He tried again and again, but without success, whereupon he wept. Later on he heard from a man versed in the scriptures that in a certain stage of spiritual advancement the Sadhaka is freed from the ordinary prescribed duties and cannot perform them.

Shambhu Charan Mallik of whose devotion to Sri Ramakrishna we already know, succumbed to diabetes about this time. His wife was his worthy partner and served Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother with great fidelity. The Master went to see him on his death-bed and on his return remarked to Hriday, "The oil in Shambhu's lamp has run out." His words, alas, proved too true. Noble and God-fearing, Shambhu retained his courage to the last. Just a few days before his death, he remarked cheerfully to Hriday, "I am not at all anxious about the end. I am ready with my kit for the journey!" Shambhu was one of those great souls whom the Divine Mother had shown to Sri Ramakrishna as one of his own, and on their first meeting the Master recognised him as such. Shambhu, as he used to say, was his second Rasaddâr or supplier of necessities, appointed by the Mother Herself after Mathur's death to look to his comforts.

In this connection we must tell of one incident of Sri Ramakrishna's life which shows how deeply the spirit of truthfulness was ingrained in his nature, and how even in his unguarded moments the Divine Mother protected him. Shambhu had a dispensary for the poor in his garden. Learning that Sri Ramakrishna was a frequent sufferer from diarrhœa, he advised him to take a few doses of opium, and offered to give some before he left. Sri Ramakrishna agreed. But in the course of the conversation both forgot about it. After taking his leave the Master went a few steps, when he remembered about the opium. Coming back he found that Shambhu was busy. Not wishing to trouble him, Sri Ramakrishna took a little opium from one of the men in charge and again set out for the Kali temple. But to his surprise he found that though he was perfectly familiar with the locality, he kept straying into wrong paths. Casting his eyes behind, he could plainly see the path leading to Shambhu's place, but the way ahead was not clear. Wondering, he went back and again started for Rani Rasmani's garden, carefully noting the way. Again he became confused. He could not find the right path, and felt a backward pull as well. After repeated struggles, it suddenly came to him that Shambhu had asked him to take the opium from him, not from his agent, who had no right to give it without permission. He might have been guilty of falsehood and theft if the Divine Mother had not deterred him! So he threw the package back through a window, calling out as he did so, "Look, I am returning your opium." Now as he set out for the temple he could see the way clearly—there was no spell over his mind—and he safely reached it. Referring to this incident he said afterwards, "It is because I have placed my whole responsibility upon the Mother, that

She holds me by the hand and never allows me to stray even by an inch from the path."

Captain Vishwanath Upadhyaya of the Nepal State, whom we have just mentioned, was descended from a line of brave and pious Brahmin ancestors. His father was a Subadar in the Indian army and used to worship the Lord Shiva even on the battle-field. Vishwanath was a great scholar and devotee. He had a passion for reading the scriptures and knew the Gita, *Bhagavata*, and Vedanta by heart. Every day he worshipped his Chosen Deity with scrupulous attention to detail. He was a distinguished officer in the Nepal Raj, and at the time of which we are speaking, was in charge of the State timber-yard opposite Calcutta. One time he saw in a dream a man surrounded by a circle of light beckoning to him to come and receive the highest spiritual knowledge. It was not long after that he heard that a great devotee was living in Rani Rasmani's garden at Dakshineswar. He set out to meet him and to his utter astonishment found him to be the man of his dream. He was so attracted to the Master that he stayed the night there. Sri Ramakrishna treated him like an old friend. Thenceforth Vishwanath visited Dakshineswar frequently.

He was a truth-loving man. Once some timber in his yard was carried away by a tide in the Ganges, causing great loss to the State. He postponed submitting the returns to headquarters for that year, in the hope that the following year's profit would make good the loss. A distorted version of the situation reached the authorities, and he was summoned to Katmandu to explain. He was frightened, but resolved to tell the truth. Before setting out for Nepal he came to Dakshineswar and related everything to the Master. Sri Ramakrishna said, "You have not stolen the timber.

Put the real facts before the authorities, and they cannot but pardon you. Don't be afraid, the Mother will protect you." Viswanath felt greatly relieved by this assurance and cheerfully started on his journey. His frank avowal of the circumstances pleased the Durbar, who promoted him to the rank of Colonel, and sent him back to Calcutta as Ambassador.

The Master still lived on a high spiritual level, plunging into Samadhi every now and then, sometimes remaining there for three days at a time. Viswanath understood the Master's lofty spiritual moods and came to look upon him as his Guru. One day he said to a friend, "I have read the Vedas and other scriptures, I have also met a good many monks and devotees in different places, but it is in Sri Ramakrishna's presence that all my desires have been fulfilled. To me he seems to be the embodiment of the truths of the scriptures. You, too, I am sure, will experience this in time."

KESHAB CHANDRA SEN AND THE BRAHMO SAMAJ

In March, 1875—about a year before his mother's passing—an important event took place in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, which was destined to produce far-reaching results. It was his meeting with the celebrated Brahmo leader and preacher, Keshab Chandra Sen, undeniably the greatest figure of the Brahmo movement of the time. A great scholar and eloquent orator of an exceedingly religious turn of mind, Keshab from a lieutenant to Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore advanced to the leadership of the forward section of the Brahmos and founded the Bhâratvarshiya Brahmo Samaj. His character and attainments made him the idol of a large number of ardent truth-seekers, and his influence on the educated youths of the day was great. Hearing of his piety, Sri Ramakrishna wished to meet him. He had seen him meditating long ago at the Adi-Brahmo Samaj, and had remarked that of all the boys there he was the only one whose meditation was successful. He also had a vision of him in Samadhi in which he saw a peacock with a ruby in its head, spreading its tail. The unfurled tail, as he said afterwards, signified Keshab's followers, and the ruby his Râjasika nature. Keshab was at this time staying with some of his followers in the garden-house of Jaygopâl Sen at Belgharia, a couple of miles from Dakshineswar. One afternoon Sri Ramakrishna accompanied by Hriday went in Captain Vishwanath's carriage to see him. Hriday went in first to announce his uncle's arrival. Hearing that a great devotee had come to talk with him on spiritual matters, Keshab asked Hriday to show him in. Sri Ramakrishna was plainly dressed in a Dhoti with a red border, one end of which was thrown across his left shoulder. Keshab and the other Brahmos at first found nothing remarkable about him. Finally Sri Ramakrishna said, "I hear that you have seen God, so I have come here to hear about it." The ensuing conversation held Keshab and his followers under its spell. Sri Ramakrishna then sang a song of Kali the Mother, with his usual fervour, in the course of which he fell into Sāmadhi. Keshab and the others were not much impressed by this trance, as such states were unfamiliar to them. But when they saw Hriday recall his uncle to ordinary consciousness by chanting the sacred Om in his ears, they were amazed. Sri Ramakrishna's face was beaming with a divine radiance. A torrent of inspiring words followed, which went straight to the hearts of the listeners. He spoke of the innumerable manifestations of one and the same infinite God, illustrating it by the following parables:

"Some blind men happened to come across an elephant. Someone told them what it was and asked them to describe it as it seemed to them. The one who touched the leg said, 'The elephant is like a column.' The second one said, 'The elephant is like a winnowing fan.' He had felt one of its ears. Similarly, those who had touched its trunk or belly, gave different opinions. So with God, everyone conceives Him according to his experience.

"A man who had seen a chameleon under a tree returned and said, 'I have seen a beautiful red chameleon under the tree.' Another said, 'I was there before you. The chameleon is not red, but green. I have seen it with my own eyes.' A third said, 'I too know it well. I saw it before either of you, and it was neither red nor green, but—and I saw it with my own eyes—it was blue.' Others declared it was yellow, or grey, and so on. Soon they began to quarrel among themselves as to who was correct. A man passing by asked what was the trouble. When he was told he said, 'I live under that very tree, and I know the chameleon well. All of you are right, every one. The chameleon is sometimes green, sometimes blue, it is all colours by turn, and sometimes it is absolutely colourless'."

He ridiculed the attempt of the human mind to fathom the nature of God, by comparing it to an ant that desired to carry a whole sugar-hill in its mouth. It is God's grace, he said, that leads to realisation. There was something in the manner of his speech that convinced Keshab that Sri Ramakrishna must have actually seen God. Stupefied and puzzled, Keshab Chandra, the high priest of the Brahmo cult, felt like a child before this man of realisation and listened to him with the utmost reverence. He opened the doors of his heart, and every word uttered by the Master found a permanent niche there. At the end of the discourse the Master said to Keshab, "Your tail has dropped." Finding that the audience did not understand him, he explained: "You must have seen tadpoles. So long as they have tails, they must live in water; but when they drop off they can live on land as well as in water. Similarly, so long as a man has his tail of nescience, he can live only in the pool of the world. But as soon as he loses his nescience, he can live in God or in the world just as he pleases. Your mind, Keshab, is in such a state now. You can live in the world, and enjoy divine bliss as well." After spending some delightful hours in this way, Sri Ramakrishna took his leave and returned to Dakshineswar.

Keshab was deeply attracted by Sri Ramakrishna. Desirous of knowing more of him, he sent some of his followers to Dakshineswar to watch Sri Ramakrishna and to report. He with some of his devotees visited the Master frequently, and long hours were spent in spiritual discussion. Gradually they became very intimate. Sri Ramakrishna sometimes visited Keshab in Calcutta, and every year on the anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj, Keshab with his party either visited Dakshineswar or invited Sri Ramakrishna to the Samaj. On many occasions Keshab came to Dakshineswar with his band of devotees in a special steamer, either to visit him at the temple or to take him out on the Ganges.

The profound influence of Western culture upon Keshab had not destroyed his love for and devotion to God. The wisdom culled from his contact with Sri Ramakrishna he was eager to share with others, and we find him expounding it in messages of hope and strength not only from the pulpit, but also in the columns of different newspapers, English and vernacular. One day, at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna explained to Keshab that Brahman and Its inscrutable Power were one and the same substance looked at from different standpoints—like fire and its burning property—both equally true. This Keshab understood. Then the Master told him that God, His devotee, and His words as embodied in the scriptures were also one and the same thing—which, too, Keshab admitted. But when Sri Ramakrishna said that the spiritual guide, the Lord, and the devotee were the same, Keshab could not follow him so far. So the Master dropped the subject, not wishing to disturb his mind by making him go too fast. Through contact with Sri Ramakrishna Keshab gradually grasped more and more of the deeper truths of the Vedic religion, and undertook the requisite discipline to realise them.

Keshab had a sincere admiration for Sri Ramakrishna. Whenever he visited Dakshineswar he brought with him some offering in the way of fruits etc., which he reverently placed before the Master, and sitting at his feet like a humble disciple, drank in his words of wisdom. One day the Master said to him in fun, "Keshab, you charm people with your eloquence. Let me, too, hear something from you." Keshab modestly replied, "I must not be vending needles in a blacksmith's shop. Rather I should listen to you. It is your words repeated to people that are appreciated so much."

In the year 1878 Keshab married his daughter to the Maharaja of Cooch-Behar, before she reached the age-limit of fourteen as laid down by himself in the laws of the Brahmo Samaj. This made a great stir in the Samaj, and a section of the Brahmos seceded from him and founded a new party called the Sâdhâran Brahmo Samaj. Sri Ramakrishna was sorry for this schism, and is said to have remarked, "Birth, death, and marriage are things that depend upon the will of God. Keshab made a mistake in trying to put hard and fast restrictions upon marriage." If anybody criticised Keshab for his action, the Master would defend him saying, "Why, what is there so very wrong in it? Keshab is a householder, and by his daughter's marriage he has but discharged the duties of a father, without offending religion." Keshab's reputation, however, suffered, and cut to the quick he turned his mind inward and strove henceforth more earnestly for realisation. This change in his attitude was reflected in the Samaj of which he was the head. Sri Ramakrishna helped him to dive deep into the profundities of the spiritual realm. Keshab recognised the need of external aids such as Homa, baptism, tonsure, or wearing the ochre robe, and himself adopted some of them. He understood that great personages like Buddha, Sri Chaitanya, or Jesus were living eternally in spiritual forms, and every one represented a facet of the Eternal Truth, a channel for the same spiritual current. To realise their ideals in his own life, he took up one or other of these types and meditated on them for some time. Needless to say, Keshab's action was due to the fact that he knew Sri Ramakrishna had gone through a similar process during his Sadhana period. For a couple of years he tried to assimilate the universal ideal of Sri Ramakrishna—that every religion was a path to God—and at the end of that time gave to the public his understanding of it, under the name of the Navavidhân (New Dispensation). Words fail to describe the reverence he felt for Sri Ramakrishna. If the Master came to the Brahmo Samaj while Keshab was conducting Services, he would stop his sermon and alight from the pulpit to greet him. At his home one day he showed Sri Ramakrishna all the places where he sat or dined or lay or studied, and requested him to bless them, so that they might always suggest holy thoughts to his mind. It is even said on reliable authority[1] that he took the Master to his meditation room and there worshipped him with flowers.

But Keshab, it must be said, could not assimilate Sri Ramakrishna's ideal *in toto*. For the New Dispensation which he preached was an *eclectic* religion, a collection of the best things from many religions, whereas Sri Ramakrishna's ideal was to allow everyone to follow his own bent—whatever it might be—sincerely and whole-heartedly, without interference.

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[1] Pundit Vijay Krishna Goswami related it to Swami Saradananda.

It was not Keshab Chandra Sen alone, but the entire forward section of the Brahmo movement comprising the Navavidhan and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, that was profoundly influenced by coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna. The members of both sections found him joining unreservedly in their prayers and songs, and naturally concluded that he was one of them. Having realised God in His different aspects, relative as well as Absolute, Sri Ramakrishna had no difficulty in guiding these devotees along their own lines, at the same time removing their prejudices so that they might concentrate their whole energy upon the search for God. Knowing that they would not be able to follow his teachings in their entirety, he told them to take as much as they could and reject the rest.

The Brahmo Samaj was much benefited by the influence of Sri Ramakrishna. He it was who instilled into the Brahmos the idea of the motherhood of God. Heretofore their prayers had consisted mainly in praising His many attributes. Sri Ramakrishna taught them to love God more intensely. "Why do you dwell so much upon the glories of God?" he said one day addressing Keshab and some of his followers. "Does a son when with his father think of his father's possessions—his houses, gardens, horses, and cattle? On the contrary he thinks of his father's love. He knows that it is proper for a father to maintain his children and look out for their welfare. We are all children of God. So what is there to wonder at in His paternal care of us? The real devotee never thinks about these things. He looks upon God as his very own—his nearest and dearest—and says boldly, 'Thou must fulfil my desires—must reveal Thyself to me.' If you dwell so much upon

His glories, you cannot think of Him as your own, nor can you feel intimate with Him. You are awed by His majesty. He is no longer near. No, no, you must think of Him as your nearest and dearest. Then only can you realise Him."

The Brahmos gained a broader and more comprehensive idea about God from the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. He would say to them, "None can limit God by saying that he has known all about Him. He has form, and again He is without form. Who knows how many aspects He has!" To those who thought that God could not have form, that it was a sin to worship Him through any image or symbol, Sri Ramakrishna would say, "It is true that water is without form. But when it is frozen into ice it has a definite form. Similarly the formless Brahman assumes various forms under the influence of an aspirant's devotion. As a toy apple suggests to one the real apple, or a photograph reminds one of one's absent father, so images or symbols help the devotee to the vision of God as He really is."

The Brahmos began to understand that there was much significance behind the image-worship—a practice which they used to call idolatry. From Sri Ramakrishna they learnt that Brahman and Its manifestation are inseparable. Being correlated ideas, each presupposes the other. They realised that a man fell into the same error by saying that God is formless only, as the man who tries to confine Him to a particular image or symbol. Any conception of God, taken singly, represents only one of His aspects. In reality God immanent in the universe—is His aspect with form; without form, but still endowed with attributes, He is called the Ishvara, the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the universe; and as the Transcendent Reality, the Absolute, without forms or attributes, He is the substratum of all that is finite, of everything that is conceivable, including even the idea of the Ishvara. It is clear to any one who thinks at all that such comprehensive understanding of the Truth will eventually reconcile all sects and denominations.

Pratâp Chandra Majumdâr, Keshab's associate, summed up the wonderful versatility of Sri Ramakrishna's character in an illuminating article contributed to the *Theistic Quarterly Review*. He wrote: "What is his religion? It is orthodox Hinduism, but Hinduism of a strange type. Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (for that is the name of this saint) is the worshipper of no particular Hindu god. He is not a Shaivite, he is not a Shakta, he is not a Vaishnava, he is not a Vedantist. Yet he is *all these*. He worships Shiva, he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedantic doctrines....He is an idolater, yet is a faithful and most devoted meditator of the perfections of the one formless, infinite Deity whom he terms Akhanda Sachchidananda (Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). To him each of these deities is a force, an incarnated principle tending to reveal the supreme relation of the soul to that eternal and formless Being who is unchangeable in His blessedness and light of wisdom....These incarnations, he says, are but the forces (Shakti) and dispensations (Lila) of the eternally wise and blessed Akhanda Sachchidananda who can never be changed or formulated, who is one endless and everlasting ocean of light, truth and joy....So long as he is spared to us, gladly shall we sit at his feet to learn from him the sublime precepts of purity, unworldliness, spirituality and inebriation in the love of God." The same writer states in another article, "He by his childlike Bhakti, by his strong conceptions of an ever-ready motherhood, helped to unfold it (God as our Mother) in our minds wonderfully.... By associating with him we learnt to realise better the Divine attributes as scattered over the 330 millions of deities of mythological India, the gods of the Puranas." This testimony goes to show how Sri Ramakrishna revolutionised in many respects the spiritual outlook of the Brahmos.

Another great man of the Brahmo Samaj who was attracted by the magnetic personality of Sri Ramakrishna was Pundit Vijay Krishna Goswami. He was descended from the great Advaita Acharya, one of the foremost figures of Sri Chaitanya's group. Brought up in orthodox surroundings, Vijay early developed a passion for truth and the spiritual life. Like many other truth-seekers of his day, he came in contact with Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and more particularly with Keshab Chandra Sen, by whom he was profoundly influenced. For the sake of truth he cut himself off from his relatives and the insignia and privileges of a Brahmin to become a staunch supporter of Keshab and his Brahmo Samaj. But after the Cooch-Behar marriage he seceded from Keshab. He burned with a passion to realise God, and when he came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna he was deeply impressed by his saintliness. They soon became friends. As the Master wished to see him often, he visited Dakshineswar whenever he had leisure. This association with Sri Ramakrishna had the effect of intensifying his yearning for God. In the course of his devotional exercises he had various experiences, which restored his faith in the different forms of the Deity, which, under the Brahmo influence, he had regarded as superstitions. His reverence for Sri Ramakrishna was unbounded, and he openly acknowledged his deep indebtedness to him. Sometimes, though separated from the Master by hundreds of miles, he was blessed with extraordinary visions of him.

Though Keshab and Vijay became heads of rival parties, Sri Ramakrishna looked upon them and their parties with the same tenderness and love. He was sorely grieved at the misunderstanding between them and tried to effect a reconciliation.

Finding that his views no longer coincided with those of the Brahmo Samaj, Vijay severed his connection with it, and pursued in solitude a course of independent spiritual practice.

Pundit Shivanâth Shastri took his place. He, too, had the good fortune of coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna, about whom he has left some personal reminiscences in his book entitled, *Men I have seen.* It was in the year 1875, while engaged as the Head Master of a Calcutta school, that he first saw the Master at Dakshineswar. "I am so delighted to meet you," said Sri Ramakrishna, "won't you come to see me now and then?" Shivanath was much struck with his simplicity and devotion, and after many visits their relationship became very close. Shivanath was amazed to find that the Master had translated into action his great injunction as to the avoidance of lust and wealth.[1] "I was present," he writes,[2] "on occasions when coins were placed in his hand by an enquiring visitor, as an experiment. The saint would go into one of his usual trances, and would remain unconscious until they were removed." Shivanath's religion did not require a man to renuonce the world altogether. It sought to reconcile the world and God. So it was difficult for him to understand the full significance of Sri Ramakrishna's life of unimpeachable purity and renunciation of lust. He writes, "Ramakrishna was practically separated from his wife, who lived in her village home. One day when I was complaining to some friends about the virtual widowhood of his wife, he drew me to one side and whispered in my ear, 'Why do you complain? It is no longer possible, it is all dead and gone.' Another time as I was inveighing against this part of his teaching, and also declaring that our programme of work in the Brahmo Samaj includes women, that ours is a social and domestic religion, and that we want to give education and social liberty to women, the saint became very much excited, as it was his fashion when anything against his settled conviction was asserted—a trait we so much liked in him—and exclaimed, 'Go, thou fool, go and perish in the pit that your women will dig for you.' Then he glared at me and said, 'What does a gardener do with a young plant? Does he not surround it with a fence, to protect it from goats and cattle? And when the young plant has grown up into a tree and it can no longer be injured by cattle, does he not remove the fence and let the tree grow freely?' I replied, 'Yes, that is the custom with gardeners.' Then he remarked, 'Do the same in your spiritual life; shun women in the beginning of that life; become strong, be full-grown, then you may seek them.' To which I replied, 'I don't agree with you in thinking that women's work is like that of cattle, destructive; they are our associates and helpers in all our spiritual struggles and social progress'

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[1] To avoid any possible misconstruction, a word of explanation is necessary with regard to Sri Ramakrishna's favourite expression, "Kâmini-Kânchana", meaning literally woman and gold. Needless to say, he used it in a general sense, meaning sex-attraction and wealth. The use of the word "Kamini" does not imply any hatred for women. He used it because he was addressing men. When addressing women, he always substituted the word "Purusha" or "man," showing clearly that he meant the sex-instinct. Sometimes he actually used the more comprehensive phrase "Kâma-Kânchana", i.e. "lust and gold".

[2] For want of space the quotation that follows has been condensed.

—a view with which he could not agree, and he marked his dissent by shaking his head. Then referring to the closing time he jocularly remarked, 'It is time for you to depart; take care, do not be late, otherwise *your woman* will not admit you into her room.' This evoked hearty laughter."

In his reminiscences Pundit Shivanath speaks in glowing terms of Sri Ramakrishna's love for him. On many occasions the Master clasped him to his bosom and requested him again and again to come to Dakshineswar. Once when he failed to come after repeated invitations, the Master went to see him. Such was his intense love for all who tried to lead a religious life. But in spite of his close intimacy, Pundit Shivanath had a strange idea about the Master's transcendental state or loss of outward consciousness in Samadhi. He saw in it only the outcome of "a strange nervous disorder, under which, whenever there was any strong emotion or excitement, he would faint, losing consciousness for the time being, while his whole countenance assumed a radiant glow, as a sign of the emotion working within." He had heard about Sri Ramakrishna's great austerities, specially as regards food and sleep, and, therefore, concluded that his trances were but the after-effect of the austere life he had led during his youth. Nevertheless, he classified these "fits" of Sri Ramakrishna with those of Chaitanya, Mahomed, and many other saints of a devotional temperament. Sri Ramakrishna heard of Shivanath's views, and seeing him one day at Dakshineswar said to him, "Well, Shivanath, I hear that you call my Samadhi a disease and say that I become unconscious at that time. You think day and night of all sorts of material things and yet consider yourself to be of sound brain, while I who meditate on the Eternal Fountain-head of Consciousness appear to you as deranged! A fine piece of reasoning!" Shivanath had nothing to say. Thinking that too great intimacy with Sri Ramakrishna was responsible for the spiritual revolution in the mind of Vijay which made him leave the Brahmo Samaj, Shivanath was anxious to ward off this unwholesome influence, as he thought it to be, from his Samaj. Asked why he no longer frequented the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, he replied that if he did so, other members of his Samaj would follow his example, and as a result the organisation would collapse.

One outstanding feature of Sri Ramakrishna's character was his extreme simplicity and utter abhorrence of show. He was the Mother's child—an instrument upon which the Divine Mother was playing. Except in exalted moods when he lost his own individuality in the absorbing personality of the Mother, he could not bear to hear himself praised. Another point of importance in connection with him was that he was, literally, all things to all men. Those closely associated with him knew of hundreds of instances where he suited his conversation to the mentality of the person addressed. For instance, he never spoke of Jnana to a Bhakta. If he were discoursing on the unreality of life with a Jnani, and a Bhakta happened to come in, he would change the subject at once and speak of the world as being real, the manifestation of the Lord! For he knew that while the Jnani would not object to the interpretation of the world from the standpoint of Bhakti, the devotee might be shocked to hear that the universe was unreal. His one idea was to help everyone towards the goal without disturbing his or her particular line of thought. This endeared him to all; everyone saw in him the fulfilment of his own mode of Sadhana, and he was, in reality, the consummation of them all. The following quotation from Shivanath's book illustrates the point. "I was seated with him," he writes, "when a number of rich men from Calcutta arrived. The saint, in the midst of the conversation, went out of the room for some minutes. In the mean time Hriday, his nephew and care-taker, began to extol his uncle before these men, narrating some of his great performances. Referring to the... period of his greatest fervour, he said, 'So great was his love of God, that he became insensible to all outward circumstances of life, apparently dead to all external events, for some time.' Just at that moment Sri Ramakrishna entered the room. He heard Hriday's last words, and took him to task for trying to magnify him before others. The words I remember vividly. 'What a mean-spirited fellow you must be to extol me thus before these rich men! You have seen their costly apparel and their gold watches and chains, and your object is to extract from them as much money as you can. What do I care what they think of me?' Then turning to the men he said, 'No, my friends, what he has told you about me is not true, it was not love of God that made me absorbed and indifferent to external life; I became positively insane for some time. The Sadhus who frequented this temple told me to practise many things. I tried to follow them, and the consequence was my austerities drove me to insanity'." Pundit Shivanath took these words literally and so failed to understand their real import.

But he had sincere respect for the Master. He writes, "I have seldom come across any other man in whom the hunger and thirst for spiritual life was so great and who had passed through so many privations and sufferings in the religious practices....I was convinced that he was no longer a Sadhaka or a devotee under exercise, but was a Siddha Purusha or one who had attained direct vision of spiritual truth....My acquaintance with him, though short, strengthened many a spiritual thought in me. I owe him a debt of gratitude for the sincere affection he bore me. He was certainly one of the most remarkable personalities I have come across in life."

Another leading Brahmo who profited by contact with Sri Ramakrishna was Trailokya Nâth Sânyâl, the famous singer and composer of Keshab's Samaj, better known under the pseudonym of Chiranjiv Sharmâ. He was deeply attracted by the Master, who loved him too. Trailokya's emotions at seeing the Master so often in the superconscious state gave him themes for many devotional songs, which later touched thousands of hearts in Bengal.

Amusing situations arose now and then. We give here an instance, though the incident happened some years later. Trailokya Nath wrote a life of Keshab, in which he said that Sri Ramakrishna, after his contact with Keshab, modified his views about the householder's life; that he admitted it was possible to attain spiritually even by living in the world. The devotees of the Master—of whom there were a number by this time—wanted this point cleared up. One day Trailokya met the Master at the house of Balarâm Bose (we shall hear of him later on) in Calcutta, and Girish Chandra Ghose, the actor-dramatist, raised the topic.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya and others): "To one who has attained the bliss of God, the world tastes as without salt. One who has a costly shawl cares no longer for piece of broad-cloth."

Trailokya: "I am talking only of householders, not monks."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What is all this that you are saying? Those who advocate practising religion while leading the worldly life, if they once taste the bliss of God, lose their relish for the world. All their enthusiasm for work vanishes. Gradually, as the bliss becomes more and more intense, they cannot work, and they seek that bliss alone. Can the pleasures of the senses compare with the bliss of God? Once a man tastes it, he runs wildly after it. Then who cares about the world?

"There may be innumerable lakes and rivers and seas full of water, but the Châtak[1] won't drink that water, though it be dying of thirst. It would be waiting for a drop of rain under the constellation of Swâti. 'All other water is like dust to it.'

"They talk of harmonising religion and enjoyment! When a man drinks just a little, he may see things in their proper order. But he can't do so if he is dead drunk."

"When a man tastes of the bliss of God, no other pleasure appeals to him. Then talk of lust and wealth is galling. The man becomes mad for God, and has no liking for money, etc."

Trailokya: "If a man lives in the world, he must accumulate some money. He has to practise charity—"

Sri Ramakrishna: "What! First accumulation of money and then God! And how great is their charity and kindness! They spend thousands of rupees in the marriage of their daughters, but the next-door neighbour with his family may be starving, and they feel constraint in giving him a handful of rice—they have to think long before doing so! While people are starving, they think, 'Never mind, whether neighbours live or die, it is of little consequence to me; let me and my family live well.' And they talk of kindness to all beings!"

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[1] An Indian bird.

Trailokya: "Among householders also there are good men. Pundarika Vidyânidhi, the follower of Sri Chaitanya, was a householder."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He had drunk of the bliss of God up to his neck. Had he drunk a little more, he could not have lived a householder's life."

Trailokya kept silent.

Girish: "Then what you have written in your book is wrong?"

Trailokya: "Why, doesn't he admit that a man may be religious even while in the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He may, but he must live in it after the attainment of knowledge, after the realisation of God. Then he remains unaffected by the evils of the world."

Girish then broached the topic of Divine Incarnation.

Trailokya: "God is incarnated in His devotees alone. The Infinite Power is not and cannot be manifested through man, however great he may be."

Girish: "You worship children as Brahmagopâla—God in the form of boys—and can you not worship a saint as God?"

Sri Ramakrishna (to Trailokya): "Why do you bring in the Infinite? If I have to touch you, must I touch your whole body? If I want to bathe in the Ganges, must I touch the whole river from Hardwar up to Saugor Island? So long as there is the 'I', there is duality. The Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute is an ocean, within which is the pitcher of 'I'. So long as there is the pitcher, the water seems to be separate—one portion is inside the pitcher and the other outside. When the pitcher breaks, there is one mass of water;

and that cannot be expressed in words. Who will do so?"

The Master then spoke personally with Trailokya. He said, "Why, you are already having the bliss of God, aren't you?"

Trailokya: "No, sir. As soon as I go away, I shall be just as I was before. Now I am in a fine mood."

Sri Ramakrishna: "If one has shoes on, one need not be afraid of thorns. If one has the conviction that God alone is real and all else is unreal, one need not dread the influence of lust and wealth."

When Trailokya left, the Master said to Girish and others, "Do you know what they are like? A frog was born in a well. It never saw the earth. So it would not believe that there was such a thing as the earth! They have had no taste of the bliss of God, and so they are talking of the 'world' and so on.

(To Girish): "Why do you waste your breath in arguing with them? They are going in for both world and God. Unless they have actual experience of divine bliss, they cannot understand it. It doesn't matter. They are not to blame. Everyone cannot comprehend the Absolute. Only a dozen Rishis appreciated Ramachandra. All cannot grasp Him. Some take Him for an ordinary man and some for a saint, while just a few know Him as an Incarnation.

"People make offers according to their capital. A gentleman said to his servant, 'Take this diamond to the market and let me know what prices are offered for it. First take it to the brinjal-seller.' The servant did so. The brinjal-seller turned the diamond over in his hand and said, 'I will give you nine seers of brinjal for it.' The servant said, 'Brother, go just a little higher—offer ten serrs.' The man replied, 'No, I have offered more than the market rate. If you agree, all right.' The servant smiled, and taking the diamond returned to his master and made his report. The gentleman said, 'Very well. Now go to the cloth-dealer. The other man deals only in brinjals, so what can he know about diamonds? The cloth-dealer has more capital, and I should like to know what he says on the matter.' The servant went to the cloth-dealer and said, 'What will you give for this?' The man said, 'It is a good stone and can be made into a fine ornament. I will give you nine hundred rupees for it.' The servant said, 'Can't you give a little more—say a thousand?' The cloth-dealer said, 'Let us not discuss the matter further. I have already offered more than its market value. I cannot give you more than nine hundred.' The servant returned and narrated his experience to his master who said, 'Now go to the jeweller. Let us have his quotation.' The jeweller looked at it and said at once, 'I shall give you a hundred thousand for it!'

"They talk of leading a religious life while living as householders. But that is like a man sitting in a closed room, with just a ray of light peeping through an aperture in the roof. Can one see the sun if the roof be overhead? What good is one ray of light? Lust and wealth are the roof. Can one see the sun without removing the roof? Worldly people are imprisoned, so to say, in the room.

"The Avataras and persons of their stamp are a divine group. They roam in the open air. They are never caught in the world—never imprisoned. Their ego is not dense like that of worldly people. The ego of the latter is like a walled enclosure with a roof—nothing outside can be seen. The ego of the Avatara is a thin one, through which God is constantly visible. Suppose a man is standing by a wall, on both sides of which are endless stretches of open space. If there be a hole in the wall, that man can see the other side also; and if the hole be large enough, he can pass and repass through it. The ego of the Avatara may be likened to that wall with a very large hole in it. From either side of the wall the Avatara has a view of the endless stretch of open space on the other side. That is to say, even though they are incarnated in flesh, they are always in Yoga. Again, whenever they wish, they may go to the other side to become merged in Samadhi. If the hole be large enough, they can pass and repass through it—they can come down to the sense plane from the state of Samadhi."

Sri Ramakrishna's contact with the members of the Brahmo Samaj gave him the first opportunity to study the mentality of the educated community of Bengal from which later came the chief instruments for the propagation of his ideas. Born and brought up in a rural atmosphere, and passing his youth in a series of stormy Sadhanas, he had had no opportunity of coming in contact with the educated middle-class, the pioneers of every progressive movement in the country. He knew little of the steadily growing influence of the West upon the minds of the people. His own life was not touched by it. He realised the goal of life by following the ancient Hindu methods. He was a Hindu of Hindus—to him renunciation was the first and last word in religion. In this he admitted no compromise. It was the Brahmos who first gave him an idea of the way the wind was blowing. He saw that they were more influenced by the philosophers of the West than by the seers and prophets of India. Hence they found the greatest difficulty in accepting wholly the ancient truths of the Hindu religion, even though his own life vividly illustrated them. They had made a strange mixture of God and the world, which he found it difficult to dislodge from their minds. He was not at all dismayed by this state of things. Behind this, too, he saw the hand of God. So, with undiminished love he told the Brahmos all about his realisations and gave out the essence of his teachings, such as the necessity of renunciation, the sincere pursuit of one's own course of discipline, faith in God, the performance of one's duties in the world without thought of results, and discrimination between right and wrong. Knowing their minds, he allowed them freedom to take as much or as little of his teachings as they liked. He thought that would be enough under the circumstances. His eagerness to meet the Mother's children of renunciation who would grasp his teaching fully, increased a hundredfold after this experience.

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LAST VISIT TO KAMARPUKUR

Shortly after his meeting with Keshab Chandra Sen, Sri Ramakrishna saw a wonderful vision. There arose in his mind a desire to see Sri Chaitanya's Sankirtana procession, to know what it was like. One day as he was standing outside his room, he saw in a vision a large concourse of men proceeding from the direction of the Panchavati towards the main gate of the temple-garden and gradually disappearing behind the trees. He saw that Sri Chaitanya, with his two greatest companions, Nityananda and Advaita, was slowly advancing in the midst of that gathering, beside himself with divine fervour, while the vast multitude was also caught in the vortex of that tidal wave of spirituality. Some were dancing wildly, while others were stupefied with joy. The mad scene of some four centuries back was again enacted before the eyes of the Master. A few faces from amongst this congregation were clearly impressed upon his mind, and later on he identified them in some of his prominent disciples. This led him to conclude that these devotees must have belonged to Sri Chaitanya's group.

Some time after this, he went to Kamarpukur, for the last time. While there, he paid a visit to several villages and joined in the Sankirtana which the Vaishnavas held. His ecstasy, resulting in frequent Samadhi during the chant, attracted the people; the news went abroad, and many other Sankirtana parties came to the scene. The place where the Master was staying was thronged to its utmost capacity with men and women, and day and night the Sankirtana went on.

This is his own description of the incident: "When I was staying at Hriday's they took me to Shyâmbâzâr. Just before entering the village I had a vision of Sri Chaitanya, whence I understood that the people of the village were devotees of Chaitanya. The attraction of the Sankirtana was so great that for seven days and nights there was constant gathering of people. All the time one could hear music and dancing, and nothing else. People climbed on the top of walls and trees to watch the scene. I stopped at Natabar Goswami's house, where there was a similar gathering throughout the day and night. In the morning I used to slip away to a weaver's home for a little respite, but there, too, the crowd soon found me out, and appeared with their tomtoms and cymbals. Again the same phenomenon! We used to bathe and have our meals at three in the afternoon! The report was noised abroad that there was a man who had died seven times during the day and who had come back to life as many times! Lest I should have an apoplectic fit, Hriday used to drag me to an open field;—but there also the same swarm of people, and the same noise of tomtoms and cymbals! Hriday rebuked them saying, 'What do you mean by dogging us like this? Have we never heard Sankirtanas before?' From far-off villages people used to come and remain during the night also. It was there I understood what divine attraction was like. In the Lord's play on earth as an Incarnation the attraction is due to the influence of Yogamâyâ, the Lord's inscrutable Power, which throws a charm over the hearts of all !"

He used to relate other interesting experiences during his visit. "The local Goswamis (Vaishnava leaders)," he said, "came to quarrel with me. They thought we would claim a share of their dues. But they saw that I did not accept a single piece of cloth or even a piece of thread! Some one had described me to them as a knower of Brahman. Hence they thought of testing me, and one of them put the question, 'Why has he no rosary about his neck and no denominational mark on the forehead?' He was answered by one among themselves, 'They have automatically dropped off like the dry branches of a coconut palm!' "

With characteristic candour he acknowledged the source of his familiar illustration, whenever he made use of it, and explained how it signified the spontaneous disappearance, on the dawning of Knowledge, of all appendages from the seeker after Truth.

Ridiculing foolish dogmatism, he said on more than one occasion, "At Shyambazar and adjoining villages there are families of weavers. Many of them are Vaishnavas, but how they talk! They asked about me, 'Which Vishnu does he accept? The Vishnu who presreves the universe? Oh, he is beneath our notice! And which Shiva?—Well, we believe in the Âtmârâma Shiva, the Âtmarâmeshwara Shiva.' One of them suggested, 'Well, you better explain to him which Hari you worship.' Whereupon another retorted, 'My friend, why drag us into the matter? Settle it yourself.' They were mere weavers by profession, and still they talked big!"

One or two incidents that happened during the Master's stay at Kamarpukur, either on this or on some previous occasion—for he visited his native village almost every year during the rain—deserve mention, since they bring out some of the prominent features of his character. Once he was suffering from indigestion and had to live upon liquids. One night, after taking his supper of milk and barley water he retired, as did the ladies of the house. Suddenly at dead of night he came out of his room with a staggering gait, and called out to the women, "Are you all asleep? Will you give me anything to eat?"

"Why? You have taken your cup of milk and barley water," replied one of the ladies.

"When did I do it? I have just returned from Dakshineswar," said the Master.

The ladies were puzzled. They realised that he was talking from another plane of consciousness. But what was to be done under the circumstances? There was nothing in the house they could offer him. One of them ventured to say, "There is nothing in the pantry except some parched rice. You may take a little of that. It won't hurt you." So saying she brought some and offered it to him, but like a petulant child he turned his face away and said that he did not care for it. They tried in vain to persuade him that any other kind of food would be injurious. Consequently they had no alternative but to purchase, at that unusual hour, a quantity of sweets, and the Master ate them all as well as the plate of parched rice. Everyone trembled to think what this heavy meal would do to him; but the next morning, to their great surprise and relief, they found Sri Ramakrishna better. The two pounds of sweets had cured him!

Another time, when he was staying at his father-in-law's house at Jayrambati, during the night he became extremely hungry. There had been a feast during the day, and almost everything had been consumed. The ladies were greatly concerned, for there was only some rice soaked in water left. Sri Ramakrishna ate all the rice, enough for at least three men! Evidently he was in an extraordinary mood, and that was why it did not affect him. How well did Sri

Ramakrishna demonstrate by these apparently insignificant acts that the human mind regulates the functions of the body to meet the demands of the situation!

We have already spoken of the fascination of his personality for people of both sexes. One day he was to go to Hriday's home, *via* Jayrambati. His constitution had become so delicate that he could not walk even a short distance; so a palanquin was brought. Dressed in scarlet silk cloth, with a gold amulet on his arm, his lips crimson from betel, he was a picture of exquisite grace. A crowd had gathered to see him off. As he was about to enter the palanquin, he noticed the gathering and asked Hriday the reason for it. "Well," said Hriday, "you are going away, and they won't see you for some days. So they have come to have a parting look at you." "But they see me every day," said the Master, "what new feature has attracted them in such large numbers today?" Hriday said, "The thing is, you look so handsome in this dress, and they have come to see you." Sri Ramakrishna was shocked to hear that people were attracted by his physical beauty. The very idea was repulsive to him. "What," he exclaimed, "people crowding to see a man! I won't go. Wherever I may go, people will crowd like this." He returned to his room and took off the robe in utter disgust. In spite of the entreaties of Hriday and others, he would not go out that day. His aversion to material things, including personal beauty, can be seen from this simple anecdote.

After a few months' stay at Kamarpukur Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar. Among the many visitors who came there was a rich Mârwâri gentlemen named Lakshmi Nârâyan, who held him in great esteem. One day he noticed a soiled coverlet on the Master's bed and at once offered to deposit in the bank in his name a sum of ten thousand rupees, so that his needs might always be supplied. The proposal was so painful to Sri Ramakrishna that he besought him with folded hands never to mention the subject again. Finding all his importunities futile, the Marwari next approached Hriday and pressed him to accept the money in the name of the Holy Mother, who would thereby be enabled to look to the Master's comforts. When this was made known to the Master, he again objected, saying that even in that case the money would practically be his, and he could not bear the idea of having any possessions. The generous man still insisted. Finding argument of no avail, Sri Ramakrishna cried out in anguish, "O Mother, why dost Thou bring such people here, who want to estrange me from Thee?" At this pathetic appeal the Marwari desisted. Referring to this incident the Master afterwards remarked, "At the offers of Mathur and Lakshmi Narayan I felt as if somebody were sawing through my skull!"

The following incident illustrates how repugnant the idea of planning things for the future was to him. For some days he noticed Hriday busying himself with a calf—tying it here, moving it about, and so on. Being curious, he asked Hriday what he was going to do with the calf. "Why," answered Hriday, "I shall take it home. In a few years it will grow into a fine animal for the plough." No sooner did the Master hear it than he fell into a swoon. Recovering from it after a long time he exclaimed, "Just look at the spirit of hoarding in worldly people! Now it is but a calf; it will grow big, and then help to till the fields! They plan so far ahead, and do not lean upon God! Ah, this Maya!" He likened the shock he felt on this occasion to a blow on the head.

At this time there arose a tremendous longing in his mind to meet his devotees—the pure souls whom the Mother had already shown him in spiritual forms during his transcendent visions. The time had come to train the instruments that were to give his message to the world; and he was burning with desire to pass on his realisations to the favoured children of the Mother. About this he would say later, "There was no limit to the yearning I had then. During the daytime I managed somehow to control it. The secular talk of the worldly-minded was galling to me, and I would look forward wistfully to the day that my beloved companions would come. I hoped to find solace in conversing with them and unburdening my mind in telling them of my realisations. Every little incident would remind me of them, and thoughts of them wholly engrossed my mind. I was already arranging in my mind what I should say to one and give to another, and so on. But when the day came to a close, I could not curb my feelings. The thought that another day had gone and they had not come, oppressed me! When during the evening service the temple rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells, I would climb to the roof of the building in the garden, and writhing in anguish of heart cry at the top of my voice, 'Come, my boys! Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you!' A mother never longs so intensely for the sight of her child, nor a friend for his companion, nor a lover for his sweetheart, as I did for them! Oh, it was indescribable. Shortly after this yearning the devotees began to come in."

RAMCHANDRA DATTA AND MANOMOHAN MITRA

The first two persons who responded to the call of Sri Ramakrishna were Ramchandra Datta and Manomohan Mitra, who were cousins and lived in Calcutta. The former was a medical practitioner and held a post in the Calcutta Medical College. Like the average educated man of his time, he was practically an atheist. Regarding himself he writes in his Life of Sri Ramakrishna: "In those days we did not believe in God, Nature being considered sufficient to explain the universe. We were rank materialists and held creature comforts to be the summum bonum of life." But he suffered from a great restlessness of mind, which he could not control. At this time he came across a copy of a newspaper conducted by Keshab Chandra Sen. Therein he read about Sri Ramakrishna and decided to visit the saint with Manomohan. One afternoon in 1879, they arrived at Dakshineswar, and finding the door shut, tapped at it. It was opened by a man plainly dressed, who, contrary to their expectations, was as unlike a Sannyasin as could be. But a few seconds in his presence convinced them that he was the saint. From the very first Sri Ramakrishna treated them as his own. He inquired minutely about them and finally called out to Hriday, who was then suffering from fever, "Come, Hriday, here is a physician. You can have your pulse examined by him." It was done. The two cousins spent the whole afternoon with the Master in spiritual discourse, and when they were about to take leave, Sri Ramakrishna gave them some Prasad. They touched his feet, and the Master affectionately asked them to come again. They were charmed at his kindness, for such cordiality and such sympathy at first sight they had never experienced before. Sri Ramakrishna's love seemed so new and so genuine to them, because it was selfless.

Being occupied during the week, they went to see Sri Ramakrishna on Sundays. From this time on their lives took a different turn. They tried to detach themselves from worldly thoughts, and Dakshineswar and Sri Ramakrishna were their absorbing topics. They felt a growing disgust for the world. Their relatives were alarmed when they found the cousins talking earnestly about God. One day Manomohan was about to start for Dakshineswar, when his aunt tried to persuade him not to go. But the attraction of Sri Ramakrishna proved stronger, and Manomohan and Ramchandra went to Dakshineswar. They found Sri Ramakrishna rather depressed, seated on his bed. Asked why he was sad, he replied like a child, "A devotee likes to come here ; but his aunt does not like it and tries to dissuade him. It makes me sad to think he might yield to her importunities and stop coming." The words had an electrifying effect on Manomohan's mind. He vowed in his heart never to listen to any such voices in future, and wondered how the saint came to know of the incident. It was this genuine love of Sri Ramakrishna for his devotees and his earnest solicitude for their welfare that completely won their hearts and drove them, without any conscious effort on their part, on towards God. Another day Manomohan was starting for Dakshineswar, when his wife urged him to stay at home as their daughter was ill with fever. But he refused and went to Dakshineswar with a heavy heart, for his near and dear ones seemed to be standing in the way of his realising God. Reaching Dakshineswar he found the Master morose, as on the previous occasion, and shedding tears. With anxious heart he asked the reason. The Master replied, "Ah, my boy, a true devotee comes here every now and then. But this displeases his wife. I am grieved to think lest he should cease to come here, following his wife's advice." Manomohan was overpowered. From that day he surrendered himself completely at the feet of the Master, whose tears washed away the dross and impurities from the devotee's heart. Manomohan and Ram became greatly attracted to Sri Ramakrishna. Not being content with going themselves to see him, they induced their relatives and friends to go to Dakshineswar to be blessed by coming in contact with him. As we shall see, it is they who introduced to the Master his two foremost disciples, Narendra Nath and Rakhal.

By this time other devotees were visiting Sri Ramakrishna and every Sunday his small room was crowded. These devotees became acquainted with one another, and those who were practising religious exercises under the guidance of Sri Ramakrishna, formed themselves into a sort of spiritual brotherhood. The Master encouraged this fraternal feeling. Now and then he would accept invitations to Calcutta to visit devotees, seeing to it that his other followers were invited as well. These meetings gradually took the shape of little festivals. There would be an arrangement for Sankirtana, and many happy hours were spent in listening to the Master's discourses. Afterwards the guests would be entertained with a dainty feast. Through these celebrations the people of the neighbourhood would learn of the Master, and many who could not go to Dakshineswar had a chance of meeting him in Calcutta.

One day, in response to the Master's proposal, Manomohan arranged for such a festival in his house. Keshab and his Brahmo followers were invited. It was an edifying scene. The devotees commenced a Sankirtana in which Sri Ramakrishna joined. Now and then he fell into Samadhi. The devotees wept or laughed as they were swayed by varying emotions. After the Sankirtana they sat with the Master, and the evening was spent in religious discussion. After supper the party dispersed.

Manomohan was proud of his devotion. One day, before a large audience, Sri Ramakrishna praised Suresh (one of the devotees) saying, 'Look at Suresh. His devotion is peerless.' This offended Manomohan, who resolved not to come thenceforth to Dakshineswar. As he was a regular Sunday visitor, his absence was noticed by the Master. He asked Ramchandra about it; the latter was not able to account for it, and Sri Ramakrishna told him to make inquiries and report. Ram found his cousin in good health and sent the news to Dakshineswar. The Master at once sent for Manomohan, but the summons was disregarded. "Be happy with your devotees, I am nobody there," Manomohan apostrophised himself. The more he thought over the matter, the angrier he became with Sri Ramakrishna. The Master sent him invitation after invitation, but Manomohan declined them all. In his stubborn determination to avoid Sri Ramakrishna's emissaries, he moved to Konnagar, a few miles from Calcutta, taking the train daily to his office. Curiously enough, he put all the blame on Sri Ramakrishna. But he had no peace. The more he tried to banish all thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna, the greater became his mental turmoil. It became impossible for him to attend to business. Try as he would, he could not fix his mind on his work; it instinctively turned to Dakshineswar. In despair he was forced to acknowledge that Sri Ramakrishna possessed his whole heart. One day, as he went to bathe in the Ganges, he remembered the words the Master had said in praise of its sanctity. Instantly there stood before his mind's eye the serene figure of Sri Ramakrishna, vivid as ever. He made a supreme effort to banish it from his mind. At that moment his eyes fell upon a country boat not far from him. He saw in it a familiar figure talking with someone and pointing towards him. The second person in the boat was no other than Sri Ramakrishna, with Niranjan. Manomohan gave a start. Niranjan said, 'Why don't you come to Dakshineswar? Sri Ramakrishna is so anxious about you that he has come to see you.' It was a hot day, and Sri Ramakrishna was fanning himself. As he approached Manomohan, he fell into a trance. Manomohan mutely watched the scene, as the tears rolled from his eyes. "Ah, he has taken so much trouble for my sake! How greatly I must have wronged him!' he thought. Overwhelmed with emotion, he was about to fall, when Niranjan jumped from the boat and caught him. By this time Sri Ramakrishna had regained normal consciousness and asked Niranjan to bring Manomohan on board. Then he tenderly said, "Manomohan, I have been very anxious about you, and I have come for you." Manomohan prostrated himself before him and said, "Sir, it was all due to my wounded vanity." He could say no more, and sobbed like a child. Sri Ramakrishna again plunged into Samadhi as the boat made its way towards Dakshineswar.

We have already referred to the atheistic views of Ramchandra Datta. His contact with Sri Ramakrishna gradually changed this attitude of mind. One day he frankly asked the Master if God really existed. "Doubtless," was the reply, "God really exists. You don't see any stars in the day, but that does not mean that the stars do not exist. There is butter in the milk. But can anybody know it merely by sight? To have the butter you must churn the milk in a cool place. Similarly you can't realise God by a mere wish. You must go through certain mental discipline." Ram was unable to take these words literally. Sri Ramakrishna read his mind and said with a smile, "God is certainly realisable. Look at the objects of His creation—they are so beautiful and tangible. He cannot be an object of mere speculation." "Yes," replied Ram, "but can I realise Him in this very life?" "You get what you desire," said the Master after a moment's pause, "faith alone is the key-note to success." After singing a song he added, "You see, if you advance towards the east by ten steps, you shall leave behind the west by so much." "But one must have tangible proof," argued Ram. The Master replied with a smile, "A typhoid patient wants to have gallons of water and heaps of rice. But the doctor pays no heed to these entreaties, nor does he prescribe medicines at the patient's dictation. He knows what he is doing." But Ramchandra found no consolation in these words.

Shortly after, he became very restless for God. The pangs of separation were too much for him. One night he had a strange dream. He saw Sri Ramakrishna, who asked him to bathe and then pronounced in his ear a sacred Mantra, which he bade him repeat a certain number of times every day. He sat upright in bed in sheer joy. Next morning he hurried to Dakshineswar and told the Master of the dream. Sri Ramakrishna congratulated him on this piece of good luck.

But Ramchandra made light of it considering it to be a figment of his fancy. His restlessness increased. In his perplexity he cursed the day he had met Sri Ramakrishna. He was between two stools—he found no pleasure in sense-enjoyments, yet he seemed as far from God as ever. A few days passed in this way. One morning at 11 o'clock, Ram and a friend of his were talking in the College Square, Calcutta, of their mental perplexities, when suddenly a man of dark complexion appeared before them and asked with a smile, "Why are you so anxious? Have patience." They were taken aback. Who might this man be, they thought, who had read their minds and bid them be of good cheer? They looked in all directions for the stranger, but he was gone. They were puzzled. It could not be an illusion, for both of them saw and heard him, in broad daylight. Ramchandra took this as a message from God. He related to Sri Ramakrishna who said, "Yes, and many more things of this sort you shall see!"

For some time after this incident, Ramchandra felt great tranquillity of mind. He tasted the bliss which is the outcome of devotion. Worldly pleasures now appeared to him insipid, and he became more and more disgusted with them. One day he even prayed to the Master to be initiated into Sannyasa. Sri Ramakrishna dissuaded him saying, "Nothing should be done on the spur of the moment. God alone knows what he means to do through a particular man. Where will your wife and children be if you leave the world? You must not try to upset the arrangement God has made for you. Everything will come in time." Ramchandra was convinced for the time being, but later brought the subject up again. Sri Ramakrishna said, "What will you gain by renouncing the world? The family life is like a fort. It is easier to fight the enemy from within the fort than from outside. You will be in a position to renounce the world when you can bestow three-fourths of your mind on God, but not before." Ramchandra was silenced.

Ramchandra came of a Vaishnava family. In studying the life of Sri Chaitanya he was struck by the wonderful similarity between him and Sri Ramakrishna. Once, at the request of the Master, he was spending the evening at Dakshineswar. They were alone. Suddenly the Master said, "What are you looking at?" "I am looking at you," replied Ramchandra. "What do you think of me?" asked the Master again. "I consider you to be Chaitanya," said Ram. "Well," said Sri Ramakrishna after a pause, "the Brahmani used to say the same thing." The ramark seemed to Ram to be significant.

As the days went by, he saw more and more of Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary clairvoyant power. One day, as he was coming with some sweets for the Master, a street-boy clamoured for a share. He gave him a bit, and after arriving at Dakshineswar put the basket in its usual place. Towards evening the Master felt hungry, and Ram offered the sweets to him. He touched them with his left hand, looked upward, shook his head as he broke some and replaced them, after which he washed his hands, to the mortification of Ram. When he came to Dakshineswar again, Sri Ramakrishna said, "When you bring anything for me, don't give any of it to anybody else. I cannot take anything without offering it to God, and I cannot offer anything to Him that has been defiled by being already offered elsewhere." Incidents such as these confirmed Ram's faith in the greatness of the Master.

After the lapse of some days Ramchandra was again tormented with great mental restlessness. The world appeared dreary to him. Again he came to the Master with his tale of woe. But this time Sri Ramakrishna cut him short with the curt reply, "What can I do? It all depends upon the will of God." Ramchandra was astonished and said, "How is this, sir? All this time I have looked to you for help. Now what shall I do if you treat me like this?" The Master simply said, "I don't owe you anything. If you like, you may come. If not, don't." Ramchandra would not have been more surprised if a bolt had fallen from the blue. He was completely unnerved. His first impulse was to put an end to his life by drowning himself in the Ganges. He left the room. The next moment he thought, "Why should I be such a fool as to commit suicide? Let me try once more. Sri Ramakrishna said it was good luck to have initiation in dream. I shall test the efficacy of that Mantra today. They say that His name is even more powerful than He Himself." He lay on the verandah to the north of Sri Ramakrishna's room and began silently to repeat the Mantra. At dead of night Sri Ramakrishna opened the door leading to that verandah, and asking him to serve the Lord's devotees, returned to his room.

Ramchandra was a bit of a miser. So he managed to forget Sri Ramakrishna's injunction about the feeding of devotees. But the Master reminded him of it and even selected a day to go to his house. Ram reluctantly agreed, but the next day his heart opened, and he saw the infinite kindness of the Master in forcing him to give the invitation. He cheerfully made the preparations, and Sri Ramakrishna with his devotees spent the evening at his house.

The next evening Ram went to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna talked with him affably and instructed him till 10 o'clock. The night was very dark. Ram had taken his leave and was standing on the verandah, when he saw the Master coming towards him. Sri Ramakrishna drew near and said, "Well, what do you want?" Ramchandra was puzzled. He felt that he was in the presence of a Power that could grant any boon. He did not know what to ask. Wealth, or even supernatural power, seemed insignificant. At length he decided to leave it to the Master. Choked with emotion he said, "Lord, I do not know what to ask of you. You decide for me." "Give me back the Mantra I gave you in dream," said Sri Ramakrishna, as he held out his hand and plunged into Samadhi. Ram offered the Mantra at his feet and prostrated himself before him. The Master touched his head with his right toe. Ram could never tell how much time passed thus. The Master came back to normal consciousness and removed his foot. Ram stood up. "Look at me, if you wish to see anything," said the Master. The devotee looked and saw in him his Ishta, the adored object of his meditation. "You need not practise any more religious exercises," said Sri Ramakrishna, "come here every now and then, that is all. And when you come, bring with you a pice worth of something as a present."

SURENDRA AND KEDAR

Ramchandra had a friend named Surendra Nath Mitra who lived close to him. Surendra was an educated man and held an important post in an English firm, from which he drew considerable income. He was a typical young man of his day, Bohemian, and with no special bias towards religion, but he took pleasure in alleviating the sufferings of the poor and needy. It is said that one day a woman Sannyasin of imposing appearance accosted him in passing with these words, "My dear son, He alone is true and everything is false." This remark impressed him deeply. He went through a hell of mental agony which drove him almost to suicide in his struggles with his lower nature. Ramchandra invited him many times to go with him to Dakshineswar, but was always met with a refusal. At last he said, "All right, I shall go. But if your saint be a humbug, I shall pull him by the ears." He went to Dakshineswar and entered Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master was talking with a number of devotees. Surendra took his seat without showing any mark of respect. He heard the Master saying to a devotee, "Why does a man behave like the young monkey and not like the kitten? The former clings to its mother, when she moves about, by its own effort. But the latter goes on mewing till the mother comes and takes hold of it by the neck. The young monkey sometimes misses its hold on its mother and is badly hurt. But the kitten runs no such risk, for the mother herself carries it from place to place. Such is the difference between self-effort and resignation to God."

This parable was an eye-opener to Surendra. "Why," he thought, "I am behaving just like that young monkey, and that is the cause of my misery. From now on I will not go against the will of God, nor think of committing suicide if things do not turn out according to my wishes. I shall be satisfied with any condition the Blissful Mother chooses to place me in, and only call upon Her." The Master strengthened his remarks with another parable. Surendra heaved a sigh of relief at the lightness of his heart. He learned to take refuge at the lotus feet of the Mother and began to look upon himself as Her child. He felt a great access of strength within him. Every word of the Master he treasured in his mind. When he was leaving, the Master said, "Don't forget to come again." Surendra was captivated and prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna. On his way home he remarked to his friends, "Ah, the tables have been turned. He has pulled me by the ears. How could I know that he was such a man, that he would read my inmost thoughts! Now I feel that there is some meaning in life."

Thus at Surendra's very first meeting with the Master he was a changed man. He became deeply attached to Sri Ramakrishna and went to Dakshineswar almost every Sunday. All were amazed at his great yearning for God. The Master addressed him as Suresh, and it was the praise of his devotion which caused all Manomohan's heart-burning. One day Surendra heard the Master saying to a devotee, "A little manliness is necessary for everybody." Thereupon he thought, "But this is my disease, and Lord save me from it!" Sri Ramakrishna at once remarked, "I do not mean that struggle for pleasure which only debases a man and which even animals have. You must have the manliness of Arjuna—to stick to an ideal up to the last breath of your life."

Though by this time Surendra had become a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, he had not freed himself from past associations, and sometimes he was led to commit indiscretions, of which he was greatly ashamed. After such happenings, he tried to evade the Master. One Sunday he did not go to Dakshineswar, giving business as an excuse, and his friends reported to Sri Ramakrishna that he had again taken to bad company. The Master listened and calmly said, "He has still some desires. Let him enjoy a little while longer. He will become stainless ere long." These words reached Surendra. On the following Sunday he visited Sri Ramakrishna, but sat at a distance in a corner. The Master noticed it and tenderly invited him to come and sit near him. Then in a half-conscious state he said, "Well, when a man goes to an undesirable place, why doesn't he take the Divine Mother with him? Then he can escape many an evil action." Surendra was a sensitive man and was much afraid lest Sri Ramakrishna should expose him. But the Master stopped there. The little that he had said, however, opened Surendra's eyes. He had tried so long to overcome his faults, and these words of the Master showed him an easy way to conquer them. His devotion to Sri Ramakrishna deepened. One day he was working in his office, when he felt a sudden urge to go and see the Master. There was yet a good deal of work to do which he could not leave unfinished. But the desire to see the Master was too strong, and he hurried to Dakshineswar. On arriving there he found the Master preparing to go to Calcutta. Seeing him Sri Ramakrishna said, "It is good that you have come. I was anxious about you and was going to Calcutta to see you."

Surendra was astonished. "How strange," he thought, "I was thinking of coming here, and he felt the desire to see me!" Then he humbly said, "If you were going out to see me, then please come to my house." Sri Ramakrishna agreed, and overjoyed Surendra took him to his home.

From this time Surendra was regarded as one of the inner circle of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees. He frequently invited the Master and his devotees to his house to hold those little festivals of which we have made mention, and it was at one of these that the Master met Narendra Nath for the first time. His purse was always open for Sri Ramakrishna's comfort. When devotees stayed with the Master at Dakshineswar, Surendra cheerfully bore their expenses also. The Master used to designate him as a Rasaddar in part, that is to say, he was commissioned by the Divine Mother to defray some part of Sri Ramakrishna's expenses.

One of Surendra's weak points was his love of drink, from which his friends tried their utmost to wean him. Ramchandra, in particular, pressed him again and again to give it up, not only because it was detrimental to his health, but because it cast a reflection upon the fair name of Sri Ramakrishna, whose devotee he had become. Surendra, who as a follower of Shakti did not look upon it as a great sin, finally said, "But why are you so insistent about it? The Master would certainly warn me if he considered it injurious to me. He knows all about it." "Well," said Ram, "let us go to him. He will surely ask you to give it up." "Agreed," said Surendra, "but you must not bring up the subject. Let him say so of his own accord, and I will give it up without fail." They went to Dakshineswar and bowed before the Master, who was sitting under the Bakul tree in an exalted state of mind. The Master said, "Well, Suresh, why should you drink wine as wine? Offer it to Kali, and take it as Her Prasad. But see that you do not get intoxicated. Your gait must not falter, nor your thoughts wander. At first you will feel the ordinary excitement, but soon it will lead to spiritual felicity." The two friends were amazed. Surendra thenceforth followed this advice. Every evening he offered a little wine to the Goddess before drinking it. Curiously enough, it opened the flood-gates of his devotion. Like a child he cried plaintively for the Mother and talked only of God. Sometimes he sat still in deep meditation. Everybody was struck by his sincerity and devotion. The evil effects of wine could not touch him.

He had a picture painted, showing the harmony of religious as conceived by Sri Ramakrishna. The prophets of all religions met there on a common platform. The mosque, the temple, and the church were depicted side by side. Sri Gauranga and Jesus danced together while holding hands! and Sri Ramakrishna pointed out to Keshab the synthesis of all faiths. Surendra sent a copy of it to Keshab, who acknowledged its receipt with the remark, "Blessed is the man who has conceived the idea."

Kedârnâth Chatterjee was originally a Brahmo but subsequently tried many other paths. He was a man of devotional temperament and attracted attention by his tears when the name of God was mentioned. But he could find no solace in religious pursuits. He came to Dakshineswar and took refuge at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master was delighted to see his spiritual fervour and assigned to him a place among his householder devotees. Kedar generally lived at Dacca and preached the message of Sri Ramakrishna among the people there. It is said that the Master, weary of instructing devotees who were coming in ever-increasing numbers seeking his guidance, once prayed to Kali, "Mother, I cannot speak to so many people. Please empower Kedar, Girish, Ram, Vijay, and Mahendra to give them the preliminary instructions, so that just a little teaching from me will suffice." The Master, who respected everybody's sincere belief, often set devotees of different temperaments to argue with one another. Kedar was very good at repartee. One day, in a discussion about God, a devotee asked him how, if God was our kind father, he would explain why there was so much misery in creation. To this Kedar replied, "Well, He did not invite me to the meeting where He decided the point." Sri Ramakrishna appreciated the reply, and often referred to it.

Kedar had within him the instincts of the Gopis of Vrindaban, and at sight of him Sri Ramakrishna would often fall into trance. The Master saw, however, that in spite of his devotion Kedar had some lingering attachment to worldly things. So he tried to fortify him against them. One day in a state of semi-consciousness he said to him, "You are still attached to lust and wealth. It is no use protesting that you are above them. Go forward. There are many more valuable things beyond the forest of sandal-wood—e.g. mines of silver, gold, and diamond, etc."

SOME INTERESTING WORTHIES

As the fame of Sri Ramakrishna spread, people in all stations of life began to be attracted towards him. Once some leading men of Calcutta came to the garden-house of Jadu Mallik at Dakshineswar to meet the Master. Among them was Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore, who was well known for his wealth and charity. Being requested by the assembly to speak, the Master emphasised the need of renunciation and discrimination. He said, "You may repeat the name of God day and night, but if your mind be engrossed in the objects of the world, you won't gain anything thereby." Maharaja Jatindra Mohan is said to have remarked, "Sir, is it possible for worldly people to pray to God in right earnest? Even a pious soul like King Yudhishthira had to tell a lie." This irritated Sri Ramakrishna, who replied, "See, you have remembered that one act of Yudhishthira's life and forgotten his usual unflinching adherence to truth, his innumerable acts of kindness, and his high regard for the injunctions of the scriptures! Shame on you!"

Babu Kristodâs Pâl, editor of the *Hindu Patriot* and one of the pioneers of the national movement, respected alike by the Government and the public, also paid the Master a visit. The topic of renunciation came up, and Mr. Pal observed, "Sir, this cant of renunciation has almost ruined the country. For this reason the Indians are a subject nation today. Doing good to others, bringing education to the door of the ignorant and, above all, improving the material condition of the country—these should be our duty now.

The cry of religion and renunciation would, on the contrary, only weaken us. You should advise the young men of Bengal to resort to such acts only as will uplift the country." "You appear to be a man of poor understanding," replied Sri Ramakrishna in an animated voice: "You dare to slight in these terms a thing which all our scriptures describe as the greatest of all virtues! By reading two pages of English you think that you know the world. You seem to think you are omniscient. Well, have you seen those tiny crabs just born in the Ganges when the rains set in? In this big universe you are more insignificant than even one of those little creatures. How do you dare to talk of *helping* the world? The Lord will look to it. You haven't got the power in you to do it." After a brief pause he resumed, "Can you explain to me how you can work for others? I know what you mean by helping them. To feed a number of persons, to treat them when they are sick, to construct a road or excavate a well—isn't that all? These are good deeds, no doubt, but how trifling in comparison with the vastness of the universe! How far can a man advance in this line? How many people can you save from famine? Malaria has ruined a whole province. What could you do to stem its progress? God alone can look after the world. Let a man first realise Him. Let him get the authority and be endowed with His power; then and then alone he can think of doing good to others. A man should first be purged of all egoism. Then alone the Blissful Mother will ask him to work for the world."[1]

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[1] These words as applying to a *teacher* or leader of men draw a line of demarcation between work done with a sense of superiority and that done in the spirit of service. Not to *help* others but to *serve* them is the right standpoint. The ordinary man working from egotistic impulses is bound, but the man of realisation works without any risk, because he knows he is the Lord's instrument.

Mahimâ Charan Chakravarty of Cossipore, Calcutta, was one of the earliest visitors to the Dakshineswar temple. He met the Master long before the coming of the disciples. Possessed of the desire to lead a religious life, he had at the same time an inordinate hankering for name and fame, which sometimes led him to resort even to untruth and prompted him to do things that made him ridiculous. He had a fondness for bombastic names. He founded a school which he called Prâchya-Arya-Sikshâ-Kânda-Parishat; his only son was named Mrigânkamauli Putatundi; he had a deer which he called Kapinjala; and he would say that his spiritual guide was one named Âgamâchârya Damaruvallabha. Sometimes he claimed to have taken his initiation from Totapuri. In this connection he would say, "While making pilgrimages in Northern India I happened to meet him and accepted him as my Guru. Totapuri asked Sri Ramakrishna to follow the path of devotion, and he advised me to stick to the path of knowledge and to stay in the world." How far these assertions were true, was known only to him and to his Maker. He had a good library of English and Sanskrit books, which he pretended to have read. One day Narendra Nath[1] took a book from his shelf and found its pages had not been cut. On inquiry he was told that the first copy had been lent to a friend, and he had bought a second copy. Narendra Nath, however, found that most of his books had uncut pages! Evidently they were kept for show.

At Dakshineswar, on special days, Mahima Charan, dressed in an ochre robe and Rudrâksha beads, would sit in the Panchavati on a tiger skin, and with a one-stringed musical instrument pose as a great devotee. When he left for home, he would hang the skin on the wall of Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master saw through him at a glance. In answer to a devotee's query about the skin, he said one day, "Mahim Chakravarty has left it there. Do you know why? People will ask whose it is, and when I tell them they will think highly of the owner."

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[1] We shall hear more of him in a subsequent chapter.

Mahima Charan used to recite from the Vedas and other sacred books, which pleased Sri Ramakrishna. The Master magnified even the slightest trace of spirituality in a Sadhaka, and so encouraged Mahima Charan in spite of his many shortcomings. As Mahima Charan was always discussing the Vedanta, the Master would try to help him to realise the conclusions of that philosophy. Knowing well that it would not be possible for him to give up the world, the Master would say, "What is the necessity of giving up the world altogether? It is enough to give up the attachment to it. But one must practise religious discipline, for one has to fight the senses."

Mahima Charan attached too much importance to the study of the scriptures, and the Master would exclaim, "How long are you going to read the scriptures? What do you gain by empty discussions? First try to realise Him, and for this go through some spiritual exercises, putting your faith in the Guru. If you have no Guru, pray to God earnestly, and He will tell you what He is like. What will you learn from the mere study of books? So long as you do not reach the market, you only hear a buzzing sound from a distance. But once there, you will find quite a different state of things. Then you will see and hear everything distinctly. After realisation books, scriptures, and sciences appear like chaff."

A middle-aged man, named Pratâp Chandra

Hâzrâ, coming from a village near Kamarpukur, lived for some years at the Dakshineswar temple. He had left his home on a momentary religious impulse, forsaking his aged mother and family, who had no one else to look after them. He was often seen telling beads, but being a little in debt, he entertained a secret desire that people attracted by his piety might help him to pay it off. Sri Ramakrishna detected this weakness and tried to correct him by saying that prayer must be free from any selfish motive. Though innocent of scriptural knowledge and realisation, Hazra posed as a great authority on religion and boasted of an independent line of thought. He, therefore, did not pay much attention to Sri Ramakrishna's teaching, and often disturbed the minds of the Master's young disciples by ridiculing their attitude of devotion to God. He himself pretended to be a believer in the Advaita Vedanta and tried to impose that attitude upon others. For this the Master sometimes took him to task and sometimes reasoned with him about the need of different standpoints for different individuals. Disputation was his foible. So much was he given to it that Sri Ramakrishna often pointed to him as an example of barren argumentation. Disgusted with his vicious habit of poisoning others' minds with undigested philosophical tenets, the Master used to say that his presence in the Kali temple was to "thicken the plot" by adding complications. And yet Sri Ramakrishna did not withhold his love and sympathy from him. Hazra had a good friend in Narendra Nath, who liked to take part in his discussions notwithstanding the Master's poor opinion of him. It was Narendra's kind intercession that extorted from Sri Ramakrishna the promise of Hazra's redemption at the time of death—a promise that was actually fulfilled.

One day the Master said to Hazra, "Don't eat too much. And give up your fastidiousness about cleanliness. Those who have this habit cannot attain to knowledge. Observe purity as much as necessary. But don't carry it to excess."

Another day he said, "What you are doing is good, but it is not done in the right way. Don't speak ill of anybody, not even of a worm. As you should pray to God for devotion, you should also pray that you may not speak ill of any one."

Hazra: "Will He hear my prayer?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, a hundred times. He cannot but do it if your prayer is sincere. Do people really weep for God as they do for their wife and children? The wife of a certain man at Kamarpukur was ill. He began to tremble apprehending that she might not recover—he was about to faint. Who feels the same way for God?"

Hazra took the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet as a token of regard.

Sri Ramakrishna (shrinking): "I don't like these things."

Hazra: "Shall I not touch the feet of one under whose care I am living?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please God, and all shall be pleased. 'When He is pleased, the world is pleased.' Sri Krishna ate a tiny bit of food from Draupadi's pot and said, 'I am satisfied.' At once all beings were satisfied—they felt as if they had eaten their fill. But was it so when the sages took food? Was the universe satiated then?"

After praising natural love for God as opposed to formal devotion, the Master said to Hazra, "One day you were telling beads. I saw it and said to Mother, "Mother, what a fool he is! Even here he is telling beads!" One who comes here gets illumination spontaneously, without any effort."

One day Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother, "Mother, if Hazra be a sham, please remove him." After a few days he left. The Mother removed him because he was trying to upset the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, who was Her mouthpiece, and that could not be tolerated.

LATU, RAKHAL AND GOPAL SENIOR

"If you want to see the miraculous power of Bhagavân Sri Ramakrishna, look at the life of Lâtu. I have never seen the like of it before." Thus said Swami Vivekananda about Latu, an obscure boy born of humble parents in the District of Châprâ, in Bihar. He came to Calcutta in search of a job while he was quite young, and entered the service of Ramchandra Datta as a house-boy. A few days after, he went to Dakshineswar to see the Master, about whom he had just heard. Being a stranger to Calcutta and its suburbs, it was with some difficulty that he found his way to the place where Sri Ramakrishna lived. As he approached, he saw a man in plain clothes pacing the verandah. He had pictured the saint as a monk dressed in ochre, but when he saw this man he forgot this idea entirely and prostrated himself at his feet. "Where do you come from?" asked Sri Ramakrishna. "From the house of Ramchandra Datta of Simla," was the reply. The Master received him kindly and conducted him to his own room, where he gave the boy some refreshments and talked with him on various subjects. Latu as yet did not know that this was the Paramahamsa he had come to see, nor did he trouble himself much about it. He only knew that he felt a great joy in the presence of the man with whom he was talking. Here was a man who seemed very friendly towards him, and that was enough. In the evening he was about to take leave of Sri Ramakrishna, when the latter said, "Don't go on foot. Take some pice and arrange for a seat in a boat or carriage."

"Thank you," said Latu, "I have some pice with me."

"Are you quite sure?" said the Master with a smile. "Otherwise take them from me. Don't feel shy about it."

Latu also smiled as he jingled the coins in his pocket, and said, "Here they are, sir."

"Come again," said Sri Ramakrishna.

"Yes, sir, I will," said Latu.

From the very first Latu was deeply impressed. He returned home and again and again spoke to Ram about the kindness of Sri Ramakrishna. Two or three days later, Latu again went to Dakshineswar, arriving there just as the Master was about to eat. The Master welcomed him and enquired if he had eaten. When he replied in the negative, he invited him to join him. Like the other orthodox people of his province, Latu did not take food cooked by Bengalees. So he declined the offer. The Master had in the mean time procured a plantain leaf for a plate, and a vessel of Ganges water. Seeing this Latu said, "Please do not trouble yourself. I will not eat here."

"Why not? The food has been cooked in the water of the Ganges. Besides, it is the sacred Prasad of Kali. Why should you hesitate to take it?" said Sri Ramakrishna.

"Please excuse me, I can't take it," Latu persisted.

Sri Ramakrishna still pressed the boy to eat, whereupon he suddenly said, "All right, I will take the food if it be your Prasad."

Latu scarcely knew what he had said. A minute before he had been reluctant to take food touched by a Bengalee. Now he thought that there could be no objection to eating Sri Ramakrishna's Prasad. He sat down to eat, the Master giving him some food from his own plate.

Latu was frequently employed by Ramchandra to carry presents of fruits and sweets to Sri Ramakrishna. The boy was glad to have these opportunities of going to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna from the very first saw the latent spirituality of the boy, and Latu also in his turn felt deeply attracted to the Master. Sometimes he would spend two or three days with him. It went on thus for some time when one day Sri Ramakrishna, extolling Latu's spirituality, proposed that Ram allow him to remain permanently at Dakshineswar. Ram considered it a great opportunity for the boy and cheerfully agreed. After that Latu stayed with Sri Ramakrishna. He was the first of that band of pure-souled young men who renounced the world and dedicated themselves to the service of the Master.

Latu loved Kirtana and other devotional songs. While at Dakshineswar, where religious singing was frequent, he would join in the song with great enthusiasm and lose himself in the ecstatic dance. Noticing the intense devotion of Latu and the other boys who by this time were gathered round him, Sri Ramakrishna one day prayed to the Divine Mother to vouchsafe some spiritual experiences to them. A few days after, Latu and the other boys began to feel religious ecstasy during their meditation. Thus in the holy company of Sri Ramakrishna, Latu began to make rapid progress. The Master trained him in meditation and other devotional exercises.

Latu was quite innocent of academic learning. Sri Ramakrishna wished that he might at least have the rudiments of education and tried to take him through the Bengali alphabet himself. But Latu was a Biharee, and his pronunciation was different from that of a Bengalee. Sri Ramakrishna showed him the first few letters with their pronunciation and asked him to repeat them. But Latu pronounced them in the Sanskrit fashion, much to the amusement of the Master, who corrected his pupil and asked him to repeat. Every time the result was the same. Teacher and student began to laugh, and the lesson was stopped for the day. The experiment was tried two or three times, and Sri Ramakrishna gave up in despair. Latu's education ended there.

Râkhâl Chandra Ghosh first came to Dakshineswar in the year 1880, just a few months before the Master's meeting with Narendra Nath. He was born in 1863 at Basirhât, District of Twenty-four Parganas, where his father was a zemindar. Rakhal showed a marked predilection for religion even in his childhood, when he used to play at worshipping gods and goddesses.

He was married in his teens to a sister of Manomohan Mitra, from whom he first heard of Sri Ramakrishna. His very first meeting with the Master gave a glimpse of the deep and intimate relationship which was to exist between them. Referring to this meeting Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Just a few days before Rakhal's coming, I saw in a vision Mother putting a child into my lap and saying, 'This is your son.' I shuddered at the thought and asked Her in surprise, 'What dost Thou mean? I too have a son?' Then She explained with a smile that it would be a spiritual child, and I was comforted. Shortly after this vision, Rakhal came, and I at once recognised him as the boy presented by the Divine Mother." He had another vision about him. One day he saw that Krishna, as the lovely shepherd-boy of Vrindaban, was standing on a full-blown lotus in the midst of a lake, and by His side stood the boy Rakhal looking at Him playfully.

This vision led the Master to identify the devotee before him as one of those pure souls who had been incarnated as playmates of Sri Krishna.

Words fail to describe the closeness of the relation that existed between Sri Ramakrishna and Rakhal during the five short years they were associated on this mortal plane. On the one hand was the untiring solicitude of the Master for the spiritual welfare of the boy, on the other, the entire consecration of Rakhal to Sri Ramakrishna. Rakhal regarded him as a parent, and was like a child of three or four with him. This is what Sri Ramakrishna said of the boy's attitude towards him: "Every little while he ran to me, jumped on my lap and behaved just like a baby! He never wanted to leave my side. The very sight of me used to evoke in him a kind of childlike feeling that cannot be described. It impressed everyone who saw him. I, too, would have a corresponding feeling roused in me, and I would feed him with butter and sweets, and play with him as a mother plays with her child." The Master allowed Rakhal privileges that were vouchsafed to none else. He even took the boy on his shoulders. On one occasion he was so much struck with his simplicity that he burst into tears as he said, "You are so simple! Ah, who will look after you after I am gone." Rakhal was designed by the Divine Mother to look after the comforts of Sri Ramakrishna, but often it was the latter who had to care for the boy.

Being a worldly man, Rakhal's father was opposed at first to his son's association with Sri Ramakrishna and often tried to dissuade him from it. Once or twice he came to Dakshineswar to see what sort of a man the Master was. He was gratified to find that many leading men of Calcutta visited him. Besides the Master received him cordially, a practice which he always observed in such cases. After that there was no objection to Rakhal's going to Dakshineswar.

Hearing of Rakhal's marriage, Sri Ramakrishna was anxious for his spiritual welfare. One day the young wife came to Dakshineswar with her mother, who also was a great devotee. The Master studied the girl's physiognomy and was satisfied. He afterwards declared that she possessed great spirituality and that she would not stand in her husband's way.

Though supremely tender and affectionate towards the boy, Sri Ramakrishna did not hesitate to take him to task whenever he made any mistake. Once, without his permission, Rakhal ate some butter. Sri Ramakrishna admonished him severely for this, saying, "Fie on you! Instead of trying to check the craving for dainties, you have taken the butter without my knowledge!" Rakhal was sincerely sorry and never repeated the error. Boy-like he was jealous, at one time, of other boys' sharing Sri Ramakrishna's affection. He wanted a monopoly of it. The Master took care to remove these shortcomings, and he soon developed into a great character.

The Master could not bear the absence of Rakhal and wept when the boy was away. Once Rakhal went to Vrindaban and fell ill. This made Sri Ramakrishna exceedingly anxious as he feared that a sudden upheaval of past associations connected with the sacred spot might prove to be the cause of his giving up the body. He actually prayed to the Divine Mother for the boy's recovery and was only comforted by the Mother's assurance. It is said that through Sri Ramakrishna's grace Rakhal one day had a most realistic vision of his Chosen Ideal. No wonder that he became in later years a fit conduit for the transmission of Sri Ramakrishna's wonderful spiritual power.

Gopâl Chandra Ghosh of Sinthi, near Calcutta, was a small trader and a man of the world in the fullest sense of the word. He met the Master about the same time as Mahima Charan. Overwhelmed by the shock of his wife's death, he was advised by a friend, who was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, to go to Dakshineswar for solace. On the first visit he found nothing very remarkable in Sri Ramakrishna. His friend advised him to go again, saying that holy men did not always reveal themselves at the first meeting. Gopal obeyed, and this time he felt the influence of the great teacher whose blessings he had come to seek. The Master's simple explanation of the utter unreality of the world appealed to him and made a lasting impression on his mind. As a result of this meeting, Gopal began to think seriously of renouncing the world to search for God. This resolution he ultimately translated into practice, devoting himself to the service of the Master during his last days. Sri Ramakrishna praised his orderliness and used to designate him as "overseer", or as "aged Gopal", because of his age.

NARENDRA NATH

The Datta family of Simlâ was one of the most cultured and aristocratic in Calcutta. A leading member of this family, Durgâ Charan Datta, renounced the world after the birth of his first child. The child, whose name was Vishwanath, grew up under the loving care of his mother and became a distinguished attorney of the Calcutta High Court. He earned much money, which he spent lavishly, mostly in charity. He was a man of many accomplishments, among which was music. His religious views extended beyond the bounds of orthodox Hinduism; and he read the Bible and the Persian poet Hafiz. His wife Bhubaneshwari was also gifted, noted alike for her practical common sense, and her power of endurance and faith in God. This happy pair was blessed in the year 1863 with a remarkable son in the person of Narendra Nath.

From his early years Narendra Nath was a distinguished figure among his playmates and companions. He was born with a strong body and a vigorous mind, but withal possessed a tender heart. Keen intelligence, extraordinary memory, deep power of thought, and vivid imagination, combined with a love for truth, a passion for purity, a spirit of independence, intrepidity in action, and compassion for the needy—all these marked him out as a progidy from his very youth. He soon acquired a mastery in various branches of learning, particularly history and philosophy. He was also a skilled athlete and a good musician. It was his father who had encouraged him to acquire this all-round education.

Nature had endowed Narendra Nath with a deep religious disposition, in which concentration was the most pronounced factor. Even as a child he would purchase clay images of gods, and play at meditation before them. One day, in a secluded corner of the house, he actually lost himself in this mimic meditation, with the result that his relatives, after diligent search, had to force open the door and shake him to bring him back to normal consciousness. Later on, meditation became his favourite occupation, and unknown to others he spent a great part of the night in this way. Like many other young truth-seekers he joined the Brahmo Samaj and once went to Maharshi Devendra Nath for religious instruction. The Maharshi found in him many characteristics of the Yogi and encouraged him in his meditations. Referring to his early visions, Narendra Nath said later on, "Every night, as I went to bed two visions floated before my mind's eye. One of them pictured me as a successful man of the world, occupying the foremost place in society, and I felt that I actually had the power to carve out such a place for myself. A moment later would come the other vision, in which I found myself a wandering monk, dressed in a loin-cloth, living on chance morsels of food and spending the night under trees, depending solely on God. I felt that I could lead this sort of life, too. Of these two visions, the latter appealed to me the more, and I thought that the life of a monk was the noblest on earth, and that I would embrace it."

As a result of his deep study and penetrating intellect, Narendra Nath acquired great power in debate. In support of his views, he would marshal unanswerable arguments which silenced his opponents. A distinguished contemporary,[1] reading in the next higher class of his college, in an appreciative article thus describes Narendra Nath's many-sided genius: "Undeniably a gifted youth, sociable, free, and unconventional in manners, a sweet singer, the soul of social circles, a brilliant conversationalist, somewhat bitter and caustic, piercing with the shafts of a keen wit the shows and mummeries of the world, sitting in the scorner's chair but hiding the tenderest of hearts under that garb of cynicism; altogether an inspired Bohemian but possessing what Bohemians lack, an iron will; somewhat peremptory and absolute, speaking with accents of authority and withal possessing a strange power of the eye which could hold his listeners in thrall....I saw and recognised in him a high, ardent, and pure nature vibrant and resonant with impassioned sensibilities. He was certainly no sour or cross-grained puritan, no moral hypochondriac;—he would indulge cynically in unconventional language except when he would spare my innocence. He took an almost morbid delight in shocking conventionality in its tabernacles, respectability in its booths; and in the pursuit of his sport would appear other than he was, puzzling and mystifying those outside his inner circle of friends. But in the recesses of his soul he wrestled with the fierce and fell spirit of Desire, the subtle and illusive spirit of Fancy."

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[1] Dr. Brajendra Nath Seal.

In his college days Narendra Nath drank freely of Western philosophy, the Agnostic doctrines of which for a time gave a rude shock to his inborn faith in God. But the inner promptings of his heart kept him at his spiritual struggle. He was not content with a theoretical knowledge of religion. He practised strict Brahmacharya and rigorous discipline, living on a vegetarian diet and sleeping either on the floor or on a blanket spread on it. Hour after hour he would pass in meditation. To quote Dr. Seal, "The conflict now entered deeper into his soul, for the creed of Universal Reason called on him to suppress the yearnings and susceptibilities of his artist nature and Bohemian temperament. His senses were keen and acute, his natural cravings and passions strong and imperious, his youthful susceptibilities tender, his conviviality free and merry. To suppress these was to kill his natural spontaneity—almost to suppress his self....He confessed that though his intellect was conquered by the Universal, his heart owned the allegiance of the individual Ego and complained that a pale, bloodless reason, sovereign *de jure* but not *de facto,* could not hold out arms to save him in the hour of temptation. He wanted to know if my philosophy (of Pure Reason) could satisfy his senses, could mediate bodily, as it were, for the soul's deliverance; in short, he wanted a flesh and blood reality visible in form and glory; above all, he cried out for a hand to save, to uplift, to protect, a Shakti or power outside himself which could cure him of his impotence and cover his nothingness with glory—a Guru or master who by embodying perfection in the flesh would still the commotion in his soul."

His yearning to realise God increased. He got no help from the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj. In his eagerness for realisation he one day approached Maharshi Devendra Nath and asked him point-blank, "Sir, have you seen God?" The answer he received did not satisfy him. It was at this critical moment that he first met Sri Ramakrishna at the house of Surendra Nath Mitra of Calcutta, about the month of November, 1880, when he was preparing for his First Examination in Arts. He sang a few songs. Sri Ramakrishna was keenly interested in the youth, found out all about him, observed his features, and invited him to visit Dakshineswar at an early date.

The examination was passed. Narendra Nath's father began to make arrangements for his son's marriage, but the negotiations fell through at Narendra's stubborn refusal to marry. His cousin, Ramchandra Datta, appreciated his motives in not marrying and said to him one day, "Why do you go about here and there in search of religion? If you have a real hankering for it, go to Dakshineswar." A little later he accepted an invitation from Surendra Nath to go with him and with some of his friends to Dakshineswar.

This is Sri Ramakrishna's account of the first visit of his greatest disciple:

"Narendra entered this room by the western door. He seemed careless about his body and dress, and unlike other people, unmindful of the external world. His eyes bespoke an introspective mind, as if some part of it were always concentrated upon something within. I was surprised to find such a spiritual man coming from the material atmosphere of Calcutta. A mat was spread on the floor, on which I asked him to sit. The friends with whom he had come appeared to be ordinary young men with the usual tendency towards enjoyment. He sang a few Bengali songs at my request. These were the spontaneous outpourings of a devout heart desiring union with the Self. He put so much pathos into the song that I could not control myself, but fell into an ecstatic mood."

What happened next we give in Narendra Nath's own words:

"Well, I sang the song, but shortly after, he suddenly rose, and taking me by the hand, led me to the northern verandah, shutting the door behind him.

It was screened from outside; so we were alone. I thought that he was going to give me some private instructions. But to my utter surprise, he began to shed profuse tears of joy as he held my hand, and addressing me most tenderly as one long familiar to him, said, 'Ah, you come so late! How could you be so unkind as to keep me waiting so long? My ears are well-nigh burnt in listening to the profane talk of worldly people. Oh, I am panting to unburden my mind to one who can appreciate my innermost experiences.' Thus he went on amid sobs. Then he stood before me with folded palms and began to address me, 'Lord, I know you are that ancient sage, Nara—the Incarnation of Narayana—born on earth to remove the misery of mankind,' and so on!

"I was altogether taken aback by his conduct. 'Who is this that I have come to see,' I thought: 'He must be stark mad! Why, I am but the son of Vishwanath Datta, and yet he dares to address me thus!' But I kept quiet, letting him go on. Presently he went back into his room, and bringing some sweets, sugar-candy, and butter, began to feed me with his own hands. In vain did I say again and again, 'Please give them to me, and I shall share them with my friends.' He simply said, 'They will have some afterwards,' and desisted only after I had finished them all. Then he seized me by the hand and said, 'Promise that you will come alone to me at an early date.' At his importunity I had to say 'yes' and returned with him to my friends.

"I sat and watched him. There was nothing wrong in his words, movements, or behaviour towards others. Rather, from his spiritual conversation and ecstatic states he seemed to be a man of genuine renunciation, and there was a marked consistency between his words and life. He said, 'God can be realised, One can see and talk to Him as I am doing with you. But who cares to do so? People shed torrents of tears for their wife and children, for wealth or property, but who does so for the sake of God? If one weeps sincerely for Him, He surely manifests Himself.' As I heard these things, I could not but believe that he was saying them not like an ordinary preacher, but from the depths of his own realisation. But I could not reconcile his words with his strange conduct with me. So I concluded that he must be a monomaniac. But I could not help acknowledging the magnitude of his renunciation. 'He may be a mad man,' I thought, 'but only the fortunate few can have such renunciation. Even if insane, this man is the holiest of the holy, a true saint, and for that alone he deserves the reverential homage of mankind.' With such conflicting thoughts I bowed before him and begged his leave to return to Calcutta."

About a month passed before Narendra Nath paid his second visit to the Master. He went alone. We quote his own words about this eventful meeting: "I found him sitting alone on the small bedstead. He was glad to see me and calling me affectionately to his side, made me sit beside him on the bed. But the next moment I found him overcome with a sort of emotion. Muttering something to himself, with his eyes fixed on me, he slowly drew near me. I thought he might do something queer as on the preceding occasion. But in the twinkling of an eye he placed his right foot on my body. The touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open I saw that the walls, and everything in the room, whirled rapidly and vanished into nought, and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious Void! I was terribly frightened and thought that I was facing death, for the loss of individuality meant nothing short of that. Unable to control myself, I cried out, 'What is this that you are doing to me? I have my parents at home!' He laughed aloud at this and stroking my chest said, 'All right, let it rest now. Everything will come in time!' The wonder of it was that no sooner had he said this than that strange experience of mine vanished. I was myself again and found everything within and without the room as it had been before.

"All this happened in less time than it takes me to narrate it, but it revolutionised my mind. Amazed, I thought what it could possibly be. It came and went at the mere wish of this wonderful man! I began to question if it were mesmerism or hypnotism. But that was not likely, for these acted only on weak minds, and I prided myself on being just the reverse. I had not surrendered myself to the stronger personality of the man. Rather I had taken him to be a monomaniac. So what might this sudden transformation of mine be due to? I could not come to any conclusion. It was an enigma, I thought, which I had better not attempt to solve. I was determined, however, to be on my guard and not to give him another chance to exert a similar influence over me.

"The next moment I thought, how could a man who metamorphosed at will a strong mind like mine be dismissed as a lunatic? Yet this was just the conclusion at which one would arrive from his effusions on the occasion of our first meeting, unless, of course, he was an Incarnation of God, which was indeed a far cry. So I was in a dilemma about the real nature of my experience, as well as the truth about this remarkable man, who was obviously pure and simple as a child. My rationalistic mind received an unpleasant rebuff at this failure in judging the true state of things. But I was resolved to fathom the mystery somehow.

"Thoughts like these occupied my mind during the whole of that day. But he became quite another man after this incident, and as on the previous occasion, treated me with great kindness and cordiality. His behaviour towards me was like that of a man who meets an old friend after a long separation. He seemed not to be satisfied with entertaining and taking all possible care of me. This remarkably loving treatment engrossed my attention all the more. At last, finding that the day was coming to a close, I asked his leave to go. He seemed very much dejected at this and gave me his permission only after I had promised to come again at my earliest convenience."

During his third visit Narendra Nath fared no better, though from the first he was determined not to be influenced. Sri Ramakrishna took him that day to the adjacent garden of Jadunâth Mallik. After strolling for some time they took their seats in the parlour. Soon the Master fell into a trance and as Narendra watched, he was suddenly touched by him. Narendra immediately lost all outward consciousness. When he came to consciousness after a while, he found that the Master was stroking his chest.

Though Narendra was ignorant of what had happened in the mean time, the Master learned many strange things regarding him. Referring to this incident he said later on, "I asked him several questions while he was in that state. I asked him about his antecedents and whereabouts, his mission in this world, and the duration of his mortal life. He dived deep into himself and gave fitting answers to my questions. They only confirmed what I had seen and inferred about him. Those things shall be a secret, but I came to know that he was a sage who had attained perfection, a past master in meditation, and that the day he learned his real nature, he would give up the body by an act of will, through Yoga."

It will be interesting to know what revelations the Master had regarding Narendra before the latter's arrival at Dakshineswar. This is how he described them:

"One day I found that my mind was soaring high in Samadhi along a luminous path. It soon transcended the stellar universe and entered the subtler region of ideas. As it ascended higher and higher, I found on both sides of the way ideal forms of gods and goddesses. The mind then reached the outer limits of that region, where a luminous barrier separated the sphere of relative existence from that of the Absolute. Crossing that barrier, the mind entered the transcendental realm, where no corporal being was visible. Even the gods dared not peep into that sublime realm, and were content to keep their seats far below. But the next moment I saw seven venerable sages seated there in Samadhi. It occurred to me that these sages must have surpassed not only men but even the gods in knowledge and holiness, in renunciation and love. Lost in admiration, I was reflecting on their greatness, when I saw a portion of that undifferentiated luminous region condense into the form of a divine child. The child came to one of the sages, tenderly clasped his neck with his lovely arms, and addressing him in a sweet voice, tried to drag his mind down from the state of Samadhi. That magic touch roused the sage from his superconscious state, and he fixed his half-open eyes upon the wonderful child. His beaming countenance showed that the child must have been the treasure of his heart. In great joy the strange child spoke to him, 'I am going down. You, too, must go with me.' The sage remained mute, but his tender look expressed his assent. As he kept gazing on the child, he was again immersed in Samadhi. I was surprised to find that a fragment of his body and mind was descending on earth in the form of a bright light. No sooner had I seen Narendra, than I recognised him to be that sage[1]."

Narendra Nath was now fully convinced of the extraordinary nature of that mighty power which was working through Sri Ramakrishna. This idea of the Master as a monomaniac was replaced by a feeling of profound respect for him. He was not a believer in the necessity of a Guru for the realisation of God. How could a man, necessarily weak and short-visioned, be the unerring guide that he had to be in order to command another's implicit obedience? This idea had been strengthened by his association with the Brahmo Samaj. Now he realised that such a man could indeed exist, and that his personal influence was of inestimable value in bringing a man nearer to God. But still he was determined not to accept anything about Sri Ramakrishna without testing it by his own experience or reason. His faith in asceticism and renunciation, however, was strengthened by coming in contact with the Master.

The reader has already some idea of the wonderful relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and Narendra Nath. Narendra was a sceptic, with no faith in the Hindu gods. He laughed at many of the injunctions of the Hindu scriptures. Yet Sri Ramakrishna instructed him with the infinite love and patience of an ideal teacher. He was full of admiration for Narendra's pure character and strength of mind. But he had apprehensions for him in one respect. He knew that the boy was endowed with rare potentialities, a fraction of which was sufficient to make of him a powerful figure in the world ; but if this tremendous energy were not directed in a spiritual channel, it might be misused. He might become the founder of a new sect or party, but that was not his mission. He was to be the Lord's instrument to bring about a spiritual regeneration of mankind. Naturally, therefore, Sri Ramakrishna was anxious to direct his mind to the realisation of God, and this was the secret of his intimate relationship with Narendra Nath. The whole story of this relationship can never be told. It was too deep for human expression. There was not the slightest tinge of worldliness in the love Sri Ramakrishna manifested for his wonderful disciple. If the latter failed to come to Dakshineswar for a few days, Sri Ramakrishna was disconsolate. He would weep, he would pray to the Divine Mother to send Narendra to Dakshineswar, refusing to be comforted till he came.

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[1] Subsequent inquiry elicited from Sri Ramakrishna the fact that the divine child was no other than himself.

Once Narendra did not come for some days and the Master was feeling the separation keenly. He was eulogising Narendra's wonderful parts to a disciple, when he was completely overwhelmed. Unable to control himself, he went to the adjacent verandah and sobbed out, "Blessed Mother, I cannot live wihtout seeing him." He checked himself a little and returned to the room. With a heavy heart he said addressing the devotees, "I have wept so much, but still he does not come. I am feeling an acute pain, my heart is being wrung, as it were. But he does not appreciate this." He again became restless and went out. Returning a few minutes later he said, "An old man pining and weeping for somebody! What will people think of me? You are my own people, and I don't feel any constraint before you. But what will others think? Yet I can't control myself." The devotees were amazed at the immensity of his love for Narendra. Sri Ramakrishna himself spoke about this great yearning thus: "For six months I suffered excruciating agony for him. I loved the other young devotees too, but it was nothing in comparison with what I felt for Narendra."

Narendra Nath was an implacable enemy of sham and iniquity, and fearlessly criticised them. His outspokenness was often mistaken for pride by people who had no insight into his real nature. But Sri Ramakrishna's evaluation of his nature was quite different. He used to say that Narendra Nath was pure gold without dross, that his acts of apparent pride and intolerance were the outcome of wonderful self-reliance and self-restraint, and that his indifference to public opinion was due to an innate purity of soul. The Master knew that the time was not distant when his personality would tower above the rest of the world, and that when he became a world-teacher, all these qualities would be utilised in relieving the distress of mankind and showing them the way to Freedom. Sri Ramakrishna's faith in Narendra Nath was unbounded, for it was based on the conviction that he could never be sullied by any impurity. His treatment of him was often very strange. Knowing full well that praise turned the head of mortals, he nevertheless spoke highly of Narendra to others in his very presence. One day there were assembled in his room Keshab Chandra Sen, Vijay Krishna Goswami with some other Brahmo devotees, and Narendra. The Master, in an exalted mood, cast his eyes first on the Brahmos and then on Narendra Nath, and a picture of the latter's future greatness flashed into his mind. After the meeting was over, he said addressing some devotees, "Well, if Keshab is possessed of one characteristic which has made him famous, Narendra has got eighteen such. Again, in Keshab and Vijay I saw the light of knowledge burning like a candle-flame ; but in Narendra it was like a blazing sun, dispelling the last vestige of ignorance and delusion." Narendra was among the audience. Instead of being puffed up by this unusual compliment, he felt insignificant in comparison with Keshab and Vijay, and protested to the Master, "Sir, what do you mean by saying such things ? People will take you to be mad. How can you compare the renowned Keshab and the saintly Vijay with me, an unknown student ? Please do not do so again." "I can't help it," said Sri Ramakrishna, "do you think those were *my* words ? The Divine Mother showed me certain things, which I only repeated. And She never reveals to me anything but the truth." But this recourse to divine revelation did not satisfy Narendra Nath. He would question its authenticity saying, "Who knows if these are the revelations of the Mother or the caprices of your own brain ? If I were in your position, I would surely attribute them to imagination pure and simple. Western philosophers tell us that we are often deceived by our senses, and the chances of deception are much more when there is a personal predisposition. Since you love me and always wish to see me great, it is but natural that these fancies come into your mind." Thus would Narendra Nath try to shake the settled beliefs of the Master. If the latter were in one of his lofty moods, these arguments were ignored as puerile ; but if he were in the ordinary state of mind, he would be much upset, at a loss to know why such a pure soul as Narendra hesitated to believe in his visions. In his perplexity he would appeal to the Divine Mother and would be comforted only when She said, "Why do you listen to him? In a few days he will admit every word of it to be true."

It would be of interest to recall another incident in this connection. Once Narendra failed to come to Dakshineswar for one or two weeks. The Master sent for him, but in vain. So one Sunday he set out for Calcutta to visit Narendra. He knew that he would find him in the evening congregation of the Brahmos. He went to the Brahmo temple, never suspecting that his appearance there might cause any displeasure to its members. Rather he had reason to think that they were generally well-disposed towards him. The preliminary ceremonies had been finished, and the preacher was about to deliver his sermon, when Sri Ramakrishna in a semi-conscious state entered. His unexpected arrival created a profound stir among the assembled devotees. All stood up to get a better view of him. Narendra had seen him from his place in the choir, and fathoming the motive of his sudden visit went to his side. The preacher stopped his sermon. The leading members present forgot to show even common courtesy to their august visitor. They had an idea that he was responsible for the split in their camp, as Keshab and Vijay had changed their views after coming in contact with him. Sri Ramakrishna, who did not notice the disturbance caused by his presence, went straight to the pulpit and fell into Samadhi. This only added to the disorder, and it became necessary to turn off most of the lights in order to disperse the gathering. But it made confusion worse confounded, and everyone rushed for the door.

Narendra was mortified at the cold reception accorded to the Master. He now became anxious for his safety. As soon as the Samadhi was over, Narendra somehow managed to spirit him away through the back-door and accompanied him to Dakshineswar. Referring to this incident he said later on, "I can hardly describe the pain I felt that day to see the Master humiliated for my sake. I reprimanded him for his thoughtless act. But he was not the least sorry for the incident and paid no heed to my words." Continuing he said, "I would not hesitate to say harsh words to him for his blind love for me without considerations of self-respect. I used to warn him that if he thought constantly of me he would become like me, like King Bharata of the old legend, who doting upon his pet deer was born in his next life as a deer! These words had their effect on his child-like mind. He was alarmed to think of the probable consequences of his love for me. He said, 'What you say is quite true. Then what will become of me, for I cannot bear your absence?' He went anxiously to the Kali temple, whence he returned in a few minutes, smiling, and said to me, 'You rogue, I won't listen to you any more. Mother says that I love you because I see the Lord in you, and the day I shall no longer see the Lord in you, I shall not be able to bear even the sight of you.' By this short but emphatic statement he dismissed that day everything that I had ever said to him on the subject."

From the very first Sri Ramakrishna had realised that Narendra Nath was the fittest person to be initiated into the mysteries of the Advaita Vedanta. He therefore asked him to read the *Ashtâvakra Samhitâ* and other Advaita treatises. But to Narendra, a staunch member of the Brahmo Samaj, these writings appeared to be heretical. He would often rebel saying, "It is blasphemy, for there is no difference between such philosophy and atheism. There is no greater sin in the world than to think of oneself as identical with the Creator. I am God, you are God, these created things are God—what can be more absurd than this? The sages who wrote such things must have been insane." Sri Ramakrishna would be amused at the bluntness of his disciple, and not wishing to interrupt his ideas, would remark, "You may not accept the views of these seers. But how can you abuse them or limit God's infinitude? Go on praying to the God of truth and believe in that aspect of His which He reveals to you." But Narendra did not give in easily. Whatever did not tally with reason, he considered to be false, and it was his nature to stand against falsehood. Therefore he missed no opportunity to ridicule the Advaita philosophy.

But the Master knew that Narendra's was the path of Jnana, that in the end he would become enamoured of the philosophy of the Advaita and be led to the highest realisation. For this reason he made it a point to talk on Advaita philosophy before him. One day he tried to bring home to the latter the identity of the individual soul with Brahman, but could not convince him. Narendra left the room and went to Pratap Chandra Hazra, and while smoking discussed the same topic with him. He said, "How can that be? This jug is God, this cup is God. whatever we see is God, and we, too, are God! Nothing can be more preposterous!" Hazra joined in this criticism and both laughed. Sri Ramakrishna was in his room, in a state of semi-consciousness. Hearing Narendra's laughter he came out, with his cloth under his arm like a child. "Hullo! What are you talking about?" he said smiling, touched Narendra, and plunged into Samadhi. Narendra described the effect of the touch:

"That magic touch of the Master immediately brought a change over my mind. I was stupefied to find that really there was nothing in the universe but God! I saw it quite clearly but kept silent, to see if the idea would last. But that influence did not abate in the course of the day. I returned home, but there, too, everything I saw appeared to be Brahman. I sat down to take my meal, but found that everything—the food, the plate, the person who served, and even myself—was nothing but That. I ate a morsel or two and sat still. I was startled by my mother's words, 'Why do you sit still? Finish your meal,'—and began to eat again. But all the while, whether eating or lying down, or going to college, I had the same experience and felt myself always in a sort of comatose state. While walking in the streets, I noticed cabs plying, but I did not feel inclined to move out of the way, for I felt that the cabs and myself were of one stuff. There was no sensation in my limbs, which I thought, were becoming paralysed. I had no satisfaction from eating, and felt as if somebody else were eating. Sometimes I lay down during a meal and after a few minutes got up and began to eat again. The result would be that on some days I would take too much, but it seemed to do no harm. My mother became alarmed and said that there must be something wrong with me. She was afraid that I would not live long. When this state altered a little, the world began to appear to me as a dream. While walking in Cornwallis Square, I would strike my head against the iron railings to see if they were real or only a dream. This state of things continued for some days. When I became normal again, I realised that I must have had a glimpse of the Advaita state. Then it struck me that the words of the scriptures were not false. Thenceforth I could not deny the conclusions of the Advaita philosophy."

The liberty which Narendra Nath enjoyed in his association with Sri Ramakrishna was unusual, as will be gathered from the following incident. He often argued with the Master against image-worship. One day, when the latter could not convince him, he said, "Why do you come here if you won't acknowledge my Mother?" Narendra replied, "Must I accept Her simply because I come here?" "All right," said the Master, "ere long you shall not only acknowledge my Blessed Mother, but weep in Her name." Then addressing the other devotees he said, "This boy has no faith in the forms of God and tells me that my supersensuous experiences are hallucinations, but he is a very fine boy, of pure instincts. He does not believe anything unless he gets direct proof. He has studied much and is possessed of great judgement and discrimination."

Sri Ramakrishna was skilled in the art of testing the fitness of his disciples. He used to adopt various means to try the real nature of a man and did not accept anybody as his disciple without knowing him thoroughly. Even Narendra Nath had to pass through this ordeal before the Master placed his trust in him. As an instance of this we may cite the following:

The arrival of Narendra Nath at Dakshineswar was always hailed by Sri Ramakrishna with intense joy and exaltation of spirit. Even seeing him from a distance the Master's love would flow out and, as it were, enfold him. Often he would be overcome by emotion at the sight of Narendra and stammer, "Here comes Na—, here comes Na," unable to complete the sentence, and would then enter into Samadhi. A day came, however, when all this was changed, and Sri Ramakrishna began to treat Narendra with utter indifference. Narendra came, saluted the Master and sat before him. But this time the usual loving welcome was not forthcoming. The Master neither greeted him nor inquired after his welfare. After looking at him once as if he were a stranger, without a sign of recognition, Sri Ramakrishna remained silent, immersed in his own thoughts. Narendra Nath, thinking Sri Ramakrishna to be absorbed, left the room and joining Hazra, who was seated on the verandah, began to talk and smoke with him. But later, when he heard Sri Ramakrishna talking to others he went back into the room. Again the Master not only did not speak to him, but turned his face away from him. This attitude of indifference was maintained during the day. Towards evening Narendra Nath after saluting the Master returned to Calcutta.

A week later, when he came again, he found Sri Ramakrishna's attitude towards him unchanged. He spent the day conversing with Hazra and others, and before dusk, returned home. The third and the fourth time it was the same. But Narendra Nath showed no resentment and continued to visit Sri Ramakrishna as usual.

Between these visits Sri Ramakrishna sometimes sent to his home to inquire after his welfare. But whenever Narendra came near him he treated him with indifference. This went on for more than a month. Seeing that he still came to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna one day called him and said, "Tell me, how is it that though I don't speak a word to you, you still continue to come here?"

Narendra Nath replied, "Sir, it is not your words alone that draw me here. I love you and want to see you, therefore I come."

Sri Ramakrishna, highly pleased with the answer, said, "I was only testing you to find out whether you would stay away when I did not show you love and attention. Only one of your calibre could put up with so much neglect and indifference. Any one else would have left me long ago and would never have come back."

On another occasion Sri Ramakrishna calling Narendra Nath to the Panchavati said to him, "You see, through the practice of severe spiritual discipline I have acquired supernatural powers. But what use can I make of them? I cannot even keep my body properly covered. Therefore, with the Mother's permission, I am thinking of giving them to you. She has made known to me that you will have to do much work for Her. If I impart these powers to you, you may use them when necessary. What do you say to that?"

Narendra Nath knew that Sri Ramakrishna possessed certain powers. But his natural yearning for God prompted him to delay acceptance of the offer until he could give it due consideration. After reflecting for a moment he asked, "Sir, will these powers help me towards God-realisation?" Sri Ramakrishna replied, "No, they will not do that, but they will be very helpful to you when, after realising God, you engage yourself in His work." Narendra Nath said, "Then I don't want them. Let me first realise God, and afterwards I shall decide whether I want them or not. If I accept these wonderful powers now, I may forget my ideal and in making use of them for some selfish purpose may come to ruin."

We are not certain whether the Master really wanted to impart these supernatural powers to

Narendra Nath or whether he simply wanted to test him. But we do know that he was greatly pleased when Narendra Nath refused them.

Narendra Nath passed days happily at the feet of the Master who, by his silent influence, was gradually capturing his heart. His method of imparting spiritual knowledge to his disciples was wonderful. At a glance he could know what particular course would suit a particular devotee, and would set himself to mould his character accordingly. Like a master-athlete he would proceed with great caution and restraint, now owning defeat at his hands to strengthen his spirit of self-reliance, now putting forth wonderful energy to overpower him in the struggle. Realising that in everyone was infinite strength, only requiring proper training to become manifest, he considered the pigmy as strong potentially as a giant. By intuition he knew that a glorious future awaited his disciples, though they were ignorant of it. Holding that bright picture before their eyes, he encouraged everyone to remain in the path suited to him; at the same time he warned them of the dangers to be expected. He kept himself minutely informed of their activities and always exerted his beneficent influence in controlling their youthful impetuosity. And all this was done silently and unobstrusively. Again and again he would tell his disciples to test his realisations. Once he said to Narendra, "Test me as the money-changers do their coins. You must not accept me until you have tested me thoroughly." One day when the Master was absent in Calcutta, Narendra came to Dakshineswar. Finding there was no one in his room, a desire arose in his mind to test the Master's renunciation of wealth. So he secreted a rupee under the bed. He then went to the Panchavati for meditation. After a time Sri Ramakrishna returned. No sooner had he touched the bed than he started back in great pain. Wondering, he was looking round, when Narendra came in and watched him silently. An attendant examined the bed, and the presence of the rupee was disclosed. Both the attendant and the Master were surprised. Narendra walked out of the room. When the Master was told of it later, he was glad that Narendra had tested him.

In the first part of 1884 Narendra Nath's father, who was the support of the family, suddenly died of heart disease. He had spent more than he had earned, and at his death the family was faced with dire poverty. The creditors were knocking at the door. Narendra's relatives, for whom his father had done so much, became enemies, even threatening to oust the family from the home. The burden of support of six or seven people, therefore, fell upon Narendra; and he was forced to seek employment. Everywhere he was met with refusals. Three or four months passed. We shall tell of this dark period in Narendra's own words:

"Even before the period of mourning was over I had to look about in search of a job. Starving and barefooted, I wandered from office to office under the scorching noonday sun with an application in hand, one or two intimate friends accompanying me sometimes. But everywhere the door was slammed in my face. This first contact with the reality of life convinced me that unselfish sympathy was a rarity in the world—there was no place in it for the weak, the poor, and the destitute. Those who only a few days ago would have been proud to help me, now turned their face against me, though they had enough means at their disposal. Seeing all this, the world sometimes seemed to me to be the handiwork of the devil. One day, weary and footsore, I sat down in the shade of the Ochterlony Monument in the Maidan. Some friends of mine happened to be there, one of whom sang a song about the overflowing grace of God, perhaps to comfort me. It was like a blow on my head. I remembered the helpless condition of my mother and brothers, and exclaimed in bitter anguish and despondency, 'Will you please stop that song? Such fancies may be pleasing to those who are born with a silver spoon in their mouth and have no starving relatives at home. Yes, there was a time when I, too, thought like that. But today, before the hard facts of life, it sounds like grim mockery.'

"My friend must have been wounded. How could he fathom the dire misery that had forced these words out of my lips? Sometimes, when I found that there were not enough provisions for the family and my purse was empty, I would pretend to my mother that I had an invitation to dine out, and remain practically without food. Out of self-respect I could not disclose the facts to others. My rich friends sometimes requested me to come to their homes or gardens and sing, and I had to comply. But I always kept my woes to myself. They were not particularly inquisitive, except one or two. Only one perceived my real condition and put me under a deep debt of gratitude by sending anonymous donations to my mother.

"Some of my old friends, who earned their livelihood by unfair means, asked me to join them. Only one or two, who had learnt by bitter experience, sympathised with me. There were other troubles also. A rich woman suggested an ugly means, which I rejected with scorn, of ending my days of penury. I refused another woman also who came to me with similar overtures.

"In spite of all these troubles, I never lost my faith in the mercy of God. Every morning, taking His name, I got up and went out in search of a job. One day my mother overheard me and said, 'Hush, you fool, you are crying yourself hoarse for God from your childhood, and what has He done for you?' I was stung to the quick. 'Does God really exist,' I thought, 'and if so, does He really hear the fervent prayer of man? Then why is there no response to my passionate appeals? Why is there so much woe in His benign kingdom?' Pundit Ishwar Chandra Vidyâsâgar's words—'If God is good and gracious, why then do millions of people die for want of a few morsels of food?'—rang in my ears with bitter irony. I was exceedingly cross with God. It was a fit moment for doubt also to creep into my heart.

"It was ever against my nature to do anything secretly. On the contrary, from boyhood, neither fear nor anything else would prevent me from expressing my opinion. So it was quite natural now for me to try to prove to the world that God was a myth, or—if He existed—to call upon Him was fruitless. Soon the report gained currency that I was an atheist and did not scruple to drink or even frequent houses of ill fame. This unmerited calumny hardened my stubborn heart still more. I openly declared that in this miserable world there was nothing reprehensible in a man who, seeking for a brief respite, would resort to anything. Not only that, but if I was once convinced of the efficacy of such a course, I would not shrink from following it through fear of anybody.

"A garbled report of the situation soon reached the ears of the Master and his devotees in Calcutta. Some of these came to me for first-hand information and hinted that they believed in some of the rumours at least. A sense of wounded pride filled my heart on finding that they could think me so low. In an exasperated mood I gave them to understand plainly that it was cowardice to believe in God through fear of hell, and argued with them as to His existence or non-existence, quoting several Western philosophers in support. The result was that they took leave of me with the conviction that I was hopelessly lost, and I was glad. I thought that, perhaps, Sri Ramakrishna, too, would believe that, which thought raised my indignation again to the boiling-point. 'Never mind,' I said to myself, 'if the good or bad opinion of a man rests upon such flimsy foundations, I don't care.' But I was amazed to hear later that the Master had received the report coldly, without expressing an opinion one way or the other. And when one of his favourite disciples, Bhavanâth, said to him with tears in his eyes, 'Sir, I could not even dream that Narendra could stoop so low,' he was furious and said, 'Hush, you fool! The Mother has told me that it can never be so. I shan't be able to look at you if you speak to me again like that.'

"But notwithstanding these forced atheistic views, the vivid memory of the divine visions I had experienced since my boyhood, and specially after my contact with Sri Ramakrishna, led me to think that God must exist, and that there must be some way to realise Him. Otherwise life would be meaningless. In the midst of all troubles and tribulations I must find that way. Days passed, and the mind continued to waver between doubt and certainty. My pecuniary troubles remained unchanged.

"The summer was over, and the rains set in. The search for a job still went on. One evening after a whole day's fast and exposure to rain, I was returning home with tired limbs and a jaded mind; overpowered with exhaustion and unable to move a step forward, I sank down on the outer plinth of a house on the roadside. I can't say whether I was insensible or not for a time. Various thoughts crowded in on my mind, but I was too weak to drive them off and fix my attention on any particular thing. Suddenly I felt as if by some divine power the coverings of my soul were removed one after another. All my former doubts regarding the co-existence of divine justice and mercy, and the presence of misery in the creation of a Blissful Providence, were automatically solved. By a deep introspection I found the meaning of it all and was satisfied. As I proceeded homewards I found there was no trace of fatigue in the body, and the mind was refreshed with wonderful strength and peace. The night was well-nigh spent.

"Henceforth I became deaf to the praise and blame of worldly people. I was convinced that I was not born like humdrum people to earn money and maintain my family, much less to strive for sense-pleasure. I began secretly to prepare myself to renounce the world like my grandfather. I fixed a day for the purpose and was glad to hear that the Master was to come to Calcutta that very day. 'It is lucky,' I thought, 'I shall leave the world with the blessings of my Guru.' As soon as I met the Master, he pressed me hard to spend that night with him at Dakshineswar. I made various excuses, but to no purpose. I had to accompany him. There was not much talk in the carriage. Reaching Dakshineswar I was seated for some time in his room along with others, when he went into a trance. Presently he drew near me and touching me with great tenderness, began to sing a song, with tears in his eyes.

"I had repressed my feelings so long that now they overflowed in tears. The meaning of the song was too apparent—he knew of my intentions. The audience marvelled at this exchange of feelings between us. When the Master regained his normal mood, some of them asked him the reason of it, and he replied with a smile, 'Oh, it was something between him and me.' Then at night he dismissed the others and calling me to his side said, 'I know you have come for the Mother's work, and will not be able to remain in the world. But for my sake, stay as long as I live.' Saying this he burst into tears again. The next day with his permission I returned home. A thousand thoughts about the maintenance of the family assailed me. I began to look about again for a living. By working in an attorney's office and translating a few books, I got just enough means to live from hand to mouth, but it was not permanent, and there was no fixed income to maintain my mother and brothers.

"One day the idea struck me that God listened to Sri Ramakrishna's prayers; so why should I not ask him to pray for me for the removal of my pecuniary wants—a favour the Master would never deny me. I hurried to Dakshineswar and insisted on his making the appeal on behalf of my starving family. He said, 'My boy, I can't make such demands. But why don't you go and ask the Mother yourself? All your sufferings are due to your disregard of Her.' I said, 'I do not know the Mother, you please speak to Her on my behalf. You must.' He replied tenderly, 'My dear boy, I have done so again and again. But you do not accept Her, and so She does not grant my prayer. All right, it is Tuesday—go to the Kali temple tonight, prostrate yourself before the Mother and ask Her any boon you like. It shall be granted. She is Knowledge Absolute, the Inscrutable Power of Brahman, and by Her mere will has given birth to this world. Everything is in Her power to give!' I believed every word and eagerly waited for the night. About 9 o'clock the Master commanded me to go to the temple. As I went I was filled with a divine intoxication. My feet were unsteady. My heart was leaping in anticipation of the joy of beholding the Living Goddess and hearing Her words. I was full of the idea. Reaching the temple, as I cast my eyes upon the image, I actually found that the Divine Mother was living and conscious, the Perennial Fountain of Divine Love and Beauty. I was caught in a surging wave of devotion and love. In an ecstasy of joy I prostrated myself again and again before the Mother and prayed, 'Mother, give me discrimination! Give me renunciation! Give unto me knowledge and devotion! Grant that I may have an uninterrupted vision of Thee!' A serene peace reigned in my soul. The world was forgotten. Only the Divine Mother shone within my heart.

"As soon as I returned, Sri Ramakrishna asked me if I had prayed to the Mother for the removal of my worldly wants. I was startled at his question and said, 'No, sir, I forgot all about it. But is there any remedy now?' 'Go again,' said he, 'and tell Her about your wants.' I again set out for the temple, but at the sight of the Mother again forgot my mission, bowed to Her repeatedly and prayed only for love and devotion. The Master asked me if I had done it the second time. I told him what had happened. He said, 'How thoughtless! Couldn't you restrain yourself enough to say those few words? Well, try once more and make that prayer to Her. Quick!' I went for the third time, but on entering the temple a terrible shame overpowered me. I thought, 'What a trifle I have come to pray to the Mother about! It is like asking a gracious king for a few vegetables! What a fool I am!' In shame and remorse I bowed to Her respectfully and said, 'Mother, I want nothing but knowledge and devotion.' Coming out of the temple I understood that all of this was due to Sri Ramakrishna's will. Otherwise how could I have failed in my object no less than thrice? I came to him and said, 'Sir, it is you who have cast a charm over my mind and made me forgetful. Now please grant me the boon that my people at home may no longer suffer the pinch of poverty.' He said, 'Such a prayer never comes from my lips. I asked you to pray for yourself. But you couldn't do it. It appears that you are not destined to enjoy worldly happiness. Well, I can't help it.' But I would not let him go. I insisted on his granting that prayer. At last he said, 'All right, they will never be in want of plain food and clothing.' "

The above incident marked the opening of a new chapter in Narendra Nath's life. Hitherto he had not realised the significance of the Motherhood of God; he had had nothing but contempt for worship through images and symbols. But now all this was changed. The secret of the worship of a Personal God was revealed to him and lent a fulness and breadth to his vision. How glad Sri Ramakrishna was over this incident will appear from the following account of an eye-witness:[1]

"Coming to Dakshineswar at noon I found the Master alone in his room and Narendra sleeping outside. Sri Ramakrishna was in a joyous mood, and as soon as I saluted him he said pointing to Narendra, 'Look here, that boy is exceptionally good. His name is Narendra. He would not accept the Divine Mother before, but did so yesterday. He is in straitened circumstances nowadays. So I advised him to pray to the

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[1] Vaikuntha Nâth Sânyâl.

Mother for riches, but he couldn't. He said he was put to shame. Returning from the temple he asked me to teach him a song of the Mother, which I did. The whole of the last night he sang that song. So he is sleeping now.' Then with unfeigned delight he said, 'Isn't it wonderful that Narendra has accepted Mother?' I said, 'Yes.' After a brief pause he repeated the question, and thus it went on for some time.

"At about 4 o'clock, Narendra came to Sri Ramakrishna before leaving for Calcutta. But no sooner had the Master seen him than he came closer and closer to him and sitting almost on his lap said, pointing first to himself and then to Narendra, 'Well, I see I am this, and again that. Really, I feel no difference—as a stick floating on the Ganges seems to divide the water which in reality is one. Do you see my point? Well, whatever is, is Mother. Isn't it?' After talking a few minutes like this, he wished to smoke. I prepared tobacco and gave him the hookah. After one or two puffs at it, he said he would smoke from the chillum (pipe). Then he offered it to Narendra saying, 'Pull at it through my hands.' Narendra, of course, hesitated. How could he defile the hands of his Guru by touching them with his lips? But Sri Ramakrishna said, 'What foolish ideas you have! Am I different from you? This is myself, and that, too, is myself.' He again put forth his hands towards the lips of Narendra who had no alternative but to comply with the request. Narendra took two or three puffs; Sri Ramakrishna was about to smoke, when Narendra hurriedly interfered, saying, 'Please wash your hands first, sir.' But his protest was in vain. 'What silly ideas of differentiation you have!' the Master said and smoked without washing the hands, talking all the while in an exalted mood. I was surprised to see Sri Ramakrishna, who could not take any food part of which had already been offered to somebody else, making this remarkable exception in the case of Narendra Nath. It gave me an idea of his love and kinship to Narendra. When, at about 8 o'clock, he was in his normal mood again, I and Narendra took leave of him and walked to Calcutta."

Afterwards Narendra often said, "Sri Ramakrishna was the only person who, ever since he had met me, believed in me uniformly throughout—even my mother and brothers did not do so. It was his unflinching trust and love for me that bound me to him for ever. He alone knew how to love another. Worldly people only make a show of love for selfish ends."

EXIT OF HRIDAY: HARISH AND BHAVANATH

We shall now pause for a while to turn our attention to an event that happened in the Kali temple of Dakshineswar in the middle of the year 1881. It was the dismissal of Hriday. A change had come of late in his attitude towards the Master. He had grown avaricious by degrees. Visitors courted his favour in order to procure interviews with Sri Ramakrishna, with presents according to their means. The Master tried to dissuade him from accepting these gratuities and forbade the visitors to offer them. This, combined with the Master's rejection of Lakshmi Narayan's offer of ten thousand rupees, irritated Hriday. The greed for money banished from his heart his old love for his uncle, and he publicly taunted the latter in the most offensive terms. In consideration of his past services the Master bore with this insolent behaviour, though at times it drew bitter tears to his eyes. Instead of trying to develop sterling qualities similar to his uncle's, Hriday imitated his outward gestures, and singing and dancing before the devotees, he posed as another Paramahamsa Deva. He extorted presents from the visitors, and at the same time tried to impose his own will upon Sri Ramakrishna at every step, making himself a positive nuisance at the temple.

Once Sri Ramakrishna was laid up with fever, when some of his devotees came to see him and presented him with a cauliflower. He expressed great satisfaction but said, "Please hide it, and don't speak to Hriday about it, or he will abuse me." Then he began to praise Hriday's faithful services in the past and said, "Mother has amply recompensed him since he has served me so faithfully. He has purchased lands, he lends out money to people and is a most influential figure in this temple, where he is highly honoured." Scarcely had he finished these words, when Hriday entered the room. The Master got nervous and said to him, "Look here, I never asked them to bring a cauliflower, they have brought it of their own accord. Believe me, I never told them to bring it." But Hriday flew into a rage and reprimanded him severely. Sri Ramakrishna appealed to the Divine Mother weeping, "O Mother, Thou hast removed all my worldly ties. Thou hast freed me from all bondage. But Thou didst keep this humiliation in store for me at the hands of Hriday!" Suddenly his melancholy mood changed. He added smiling, "He loves me dearly and, therefore, scolds me. He is a mere boy and knows not what he does. Thou must not be angry with him, Mother!" With this he entered into Samadhi.

Hriday's conduct gradually became unbearable. He insulted everybody who came in contact with him. Even the other employees of the Kali temple were attacked. He paid no heed to the repeated warnings of Sri Ramakrishna. But at last the time for retribution came. The anniversary of the foundation day was celebrated in the temple with a festival. In the year of which we are speaking, Trailokya Nath, the son of Mathur, attended this festival with his wife and children. His eight-year old daughter was present in the temple when Hriday was worshipping the goddess Kali. Hriday was seized with a desire to worship the Mother in the girl, and according to the Tantrika rites offered flowers and sandal-paste at her feet. When the girl returned home her mother noticed on her feet the marks of sandal-paste. Upon inquiry she learned all that had happened from the girl and was alarmed. A Brahmin worshipping the feet of a Shudra girl! It could not but bring a calamity upon the girl. Her fears worked upon Trailokya Nath, who ordered Hriday to leave the temple premises at once. Hriday told everything to his uncle. The Master asked, "Why did you act like that? Now what will you do?" Nothing daunted, Hriday answered, "Why do you worry about it, uncle? You come with me. You ought not to stay here any more. Some day they will insult you also." "Why should I go?" said the Master: "I am not leaving." Hriday left the garden with a heavy heart. Shortly after, some one came and told Sri Ramakrishna that he, too, must leave the garden. Without a murmur, the Master rose and walked towards the gate. Trailokya saw him from a distance and hurrying up to him said, "Sir, where are you going?" The Master quietly replied, "Didn't you order me to leave the garden?" Trailokya implored him to come back and said, "Kindly pray to the Mother that the girl may not be injured!" "Through the Mother's grace she will be all right," said the Master and returned to his room, as if nothing had happened. Referring to Hriday's expulsion, Sri Ramakrishna said later on, "His high-handed conduct gradually became intolerable, and the Mother removed him as his presence was hampering Her work." The exit of Hriday made it easy for the young devotees of Sri Ramakrishna to wait on him and to avail themselves of the rare opportunity of moulding their lives under his direct guidance.

Hriday took up his residence at the adjacent garden-house of Jadu Mallik. Sri Ramakrishna used to send his meals to him and also went to see him. Hriday requested him again to leave and proposed that he establish a Kali temple elsewhere, where they might live happily together. At this the Master is said to have remarked, "Well, do you mean to hawk me from door to door like a curio?"

Three years after the above incident, the Master was talking to a number of devotees, when he was informed that Hriday was waiting to interview him at the gate of Jadu Mallik's garden. Sri Ramakrishna, who never forgot his devoted servant, asked the audience to wait and went out to see him. Just beyond Rani Rasmani's garden, he found Hriday standing with folded hands. As soon as he saw the Master, Hriday fell flat on the ground. Sri Ramakrishna told him to get up. Hriday wept like a boy.

The Master also was moved to tears. With his hand he wiped them away so as to hide his emotion. It was a most touching sight.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, what makes you leave your home to come here?"

Hriday (weeping): "I have come to see you. To whom else shall I tell my troubles?"

Sri Ramakrishna (to console him, smiling): "The world is full of troubles. One cannot avoid them. What is yours?"

Hriday (weeping): "I am deprived of your company, and that's what is troubling me."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why, it was you who said, 'Let each of us walk in his own path!' "

Hriday: "So I did. But I was a fool."

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right. Good-bye now. I shall talk with you at leisure some other day. It is Sunday, and many visitors are waiting. What is the condition of the crops this year over there?"

Hriday: Fairly good."

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right. Come another day."

Hriday prostrated himself again before the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna returned to the temple, talking with the devotees about Hriday's faithful services as well as the torments to which he had been subjected by him.

One of the first devotees to live with the Master after Hriday's departure was Harish. He was a young man in affluent circumstances, with a wife and child. After paying a few visits to the Master, he sickened of the world and resolved to spend his days at Dakshineswar, renouncing home and family. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased with his sincerity, singleness of purpose and quiet nature, and gave him shelter. Thereafter Harish lived mostly at Dakshineswar, looking after the comforts of the Master and devoting his leisure hours to prayer and meditation. He bore calmly the threats and entreaties of his relatives. Indifferent to all the temptations of the world, he pursued silently and resolutely his own course towards the realisation of the great end to which he had set himself. Referring to his unperturbed peace of mind the Master used to say, "Real men are dead to the world even while living. Look at Harish!" One day Harish learnt that his relatives were sorely afflicted at his leaving them, particularly his wife, who could neither eat nor sleep. He simply kept quiet. To test the strength of his mind, however, Sri Ramakrishna took him aside and said, "Your wife is suffering; why don't you go home and console her? What's the harm if you show a little kindness to the poor girl?" "Sir," replied Harish, "this is not the occasion to show kindness. If I try to be kind to her, there is a possibility of my forgetting the ideal and becoming entangled in the world. Kindly excuse me." Sri Ramakrishna was highly pleased at his answer and often spoke of his spirit of renunciation to others.

Another devotee of rare qualities was Bhavanath Chatterjee, who was still in his teens when he met Sri

Ramakrishna in 1881. His parents and relatives looked upon the Master as insane and warned Bhavanath not to frequent Dakshineswar. But he could not keep away from the Master, and against the wishes of his guardians, he often spent the night there. He was a member of the Brahmo Samaj, and the impersonal aspect of God appealed to him strongly. Sri Ramakrishna loved him for his sincerity and devotion. Noticing his attachment to Narendra Nath, the Master often remarked that he was a fit companion for him and advised him to make the association very close. He was one of those whom Sri Ramakrishna classed as "the eternally perfect." While frequenting Dakshineswar, Bhavanath became a vegetarian and gave up the chewing of betel, considering it helpful in the religious life. But Sri Ramakrishna, who used to lay more stress on the internal purification of the heart than on the observance of external forms, said to him with a smile, "Well, what's the use of giving up fish or betel? They do not constitute the essence of religion. The real thing is renunciation of lust and wealth." Bhavanath was married early, but he turned his face from enjoyment. One day the Master, to test his earnestness, said to him, "Why don't you enjoy the world a bit?" Bhavanath was indignant and said, "Sir, should we, too, indulge in vulgar pleasures?" The Master was highly pleased with the reply. The very sight of Bhavanath's purity often roused divine emotions in Sri Ramakrishna's mind.

TARAK NATH AND NITYAGOPAL

Târak Nâth Ghoshâl belonged to the Ghoshal family of Bârâsat, District of Twenty-four Parganas. His father, Râm Kânâi Ghoshal, was legal adviser for the Rani Rasmani estate. He was a great devotee of the Divine Mother and used to frequent the Kali temple of Dakshineswar during the Sadhana period of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus he came to know the Master rather intimately. At that time the Master was suffering from the burning sensations which medicines could not cure. One day the Master told Ram Kanai, who was visiting him, of his affliction, and asked if he could suggest any remedy. Ram Kanai recommended him to wear on his arm his Ishta Kavacha—an amulet with the Lord's holy name—and he was instantly relieved.

From his very boyhood, Tarak used to practise meditation. The noble desire to pierce the veil that separates the seen from the unseen, stirred his mind at an early age. Like many religious-minded young men of the time Tarak was a member of the Brahmo Samaj under Keshab Chandra Sen, from whose writings he first came to know about the Master.

About this time he went to Mughal Sarai where he continued his religious discipline and spent hours with a friend discussing God and religion. One day, in answer to his query about Samadhi his friend said that real Samadhi was a rare phenomenon, but he knew of one man who had certainly experienced that blessed state. He told about Sri Ramakrishna and referred to some incidents of the Master's life. Tarak became deeply interested and eagerly awaited the day that he would be able to meet him.

After some time he returned to Calcutta and began to attend the religious services of the Brahmo Samaj. From a relative of Ramchandra Datta he learnt many things about the Master. Gradually the ideals of the Brahmo Samaj became unsatisfactory to him. He was eager to dive deep into the mysteries of spiritual life and realise the Truth. At this time he heard one day that the Master was going to visit Ramchandra. He resolved to avail himself of this opportunity to meet him, and when the long-looked-for evening arrived, he went to the house of Ram, where, before a crowded audience, the Master in a semi-conscious state was talking. Tarak listened to the words with attention. He was anxious to learn something about Samadhi. He caught a few words and was astonished to find that that was the Master's subject. He was overjoyed and left with the determination to see the Master next Saturday, at Dakshineswar.

He did not know much about Dakshineswar, but a friend agreed to take him there. When they reached Dakshineswar the evening service was about to begin. The Master was walking on the bank of the Ganges with Bhavanath. Tarak approached him and touched his feet. Sri Ramakrishna learnt that he came from Calcutta and inquired of him about the health of Ramchandra and Narendra Nath, without even knowing if these two devotees were known to him. Tarak was much surprised to find the great interest the Master had in his devotees and said, "I do not know much about them. They must be well." The Master next inquired if he had seen him on the previous Saturday at the house of Ram. Tarak replied in the affirmative. Asking him to follow, the Master went to the north verandah.

Bhavanath spread a mat on the floor, on which all sat. "In what do you believe," asked the Master, "in God with form or without form?" "In God without form," replied Tarak. "You can't but admit the Divine Shakti also," said the Master, and he took the boy to the Kali temple. The evening service was going on. Sri Ramakrishna prostrated himself before the image. Tarak at first hesitated to follow his example, because, according to the ideas of the Brahmo Samaj, the image was nothing but stone. But suddenly the thought flashed in his mind, "Why should I have such petty ideas? I hear that God is omnipresent. He lives everywhere. Then He must be present in the stone image as well." Whereupon he prostrated himself before the image.

Sri Ramakrishna requested Tarak again and again to remain overnight. "Stay here tonight," he said, "you can't gain any permanent good by the chance visit of a day. You must come here often." Tarak begged to be excused as he had already said he would stay with his friend. Then he took leave of the Master, promising to see him next evening. When he came again, Sri Ramakrishna asked him for some ice. Tarak did not know where to get it. He spoke of the matter to a friend who was acquainted with Surendra, and the latter procured some and sent it to Sri Ramakrishna.

Tarak became better and better acquainted with the Master. The latter one day said to him, "I do not generally ask one who comes to me about his father's name or whereabouts. I only look into his heart and read his feelings. But I wish to know something about your father and people at home." He was agreeably surprised to learn that Ram Kanai was his father, and telling of the service the latter had done him, wished that he (Ram Kanai) might see him again. Some time later Ram Kanai came to Dakshineswar and prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna, who placed his foot on his head and entered into Samadhi. Ram Kanai eagerly grasped the Master's feet and burst into tears.

Tarak was greatly attracted by the Master. He was always on the look-out for an opportunity to see him. One day, probably on the occasion of his third or fourh visit, Sri Ramakrishna took him aside and asked him to put out his tongue. Then he wrote something on it, and the boy at once felt a strange sensation within him; his mind was withdrawn from the external world and he went into deep meditation. Another time the Master did the same thing with the same results.

Referring to the state of his mind at this time Tarak said, "I often felt inclined to cry in the presence of the Master. One night I wept profusely, standing in front of the Kali temple. The Master was anxious at my absence, and when I went to him he said, 'God favours those who can weep for Him. Tears thus shed wash away the sins of former births.' Another day I was meditating in the Panchavati, when the Master came near. No sooner had he cast his glance at me than I burst into tears. He stood still without uttering a word. A sort of creeping sensation passed through me, and I began to tremble all over. The Master congratulated me on attaining this state and said it was the outcome of divine emotion. He then took me to his room and gave me something to eat. He could arouse the latent spiritual powers of a devotee at a mere glance."

Now Tarak realised that he had come to a man who could illumine the way to the ultimate goal of existence. The closer he associated with the Master, the more he felt that his ties were being cut by the silent influence of his Guru. Married though he was, the world began to lose all attraction for him. He felt that Sri Ramakrishna was the consummation of all religions. To know him fully was to know God. With the awakening of this knowledge, Tarak's love and devotion for the Master increased a hundredfold. Sri Ramakrishna cherished a great love for this disciple. He took charge of him and moulded his spiritual life in all possible ways.

Another young man named Nityagopâl was a frequent visitor at Dakshineswar and had a high regard for Sri Ramakrishna. He experienced great emotion at the name of God, and while listening to religious songs often fell into trances. Sri Ramakrishna loved him greatly and used to say that he had attained the Paramahamsa state. Days and nights he would spend in prayer and meditation, and his chest glowed under the influence of divine fervour. He was, indeed, a great soul and the Master was seen to dance, in an exalted mood, clasping the hands of this fortunate youth. This indicated an exceptional degree of purity in Nityagopal. When both were in this lofty state, they spoke to each other in a language which was unintelligible to others.

One day the Master with a number of devotees came to the house of Ramchandra Datta. As soon as the Kirtana commenced, he went into Samadhi and put his feet on the lap of Nityagopal who was seated near by. Overcome with emotion the boy burst into tears. After a while the Master regained partial consciousness. A woman devotee had a motherly attitude towards this boy and often invited him to her home. The Master warned him against this sort of intimacy, saying, "Don't go there often. A Sannyasin must observe very rigid rules. He must not look at even the portrait of a woman; he should not associate with a woman even if she be a great devotee. A monk, even though he is a master of his senses, should observe these rules to set an example to others, who will learn renunciation from this ideal of self-denial. Otherwise they will succumb to temptation. This, of course, does not apply to householders. A Sannyasin is a world-teacher."

The reader may not have forgotten Gopâl Sen, one of the two young devotees of Baranagore who used to come to Sri Ramakrishna during his Sadhana period and died prematurely. The Master was sometimes heard to remark that, perhaps, Nityagopal was that boy reincarnated.[1]

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[1] Nityagopal subsequently renounced the world and became known as Swâmi Jnânânanda Avadhuta with a following of his own.

BALARAM BOSE

Balarâm Bose of Bâghbâzâr, Calcutta, came of a rich family having landed estates in Orissa and far-famed for its piety and generosity. From his youth he was of a deeply religious turn of mind and lived a retired life in holy places, leaving the management of his estate to the care of his cousin and living on a small monthly allowance. He spent most of his time in meditation and prayer or in studying the Vaishnava scriptures. At Puri he was attracted by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna as they appeared in Keshab's journal. He felt a strong desire to see the man who could say such beautiful things about God. Just then a friend who had already paid several visits to Sri Ramakrishna and had wonderful glimpses of his personality, wrote to him about the God-intoxicated saint and asked him to come to visit him. Balaram waited no longer, specially as it so happened that his daughter's marriage ceremony was to take place at that time in Calcutta. The day following his arrival in Calcutta (1882), he started for Dakshineswar. There was a great crowd in the temple-garden, owing to the presence of Keshab Chandra Sen and his Brahmo followers. Balaram sat in a corner of the Master's room, and when the party went to eat, Sri Ramakrishna called to him and inquired if he had anything to ask. "Sir," said Balaram, "does God really exist?" "Certainly," replied the Master. "Can anybody realise Him?" "Yes," said the Master, "He reveals Himself to the devotee who thinks of Him as his nearest and dearest. Because you do not get any response by praying to Him once, you must not conclude that He does not exist." "But," again interrogated Balaram, "why can't I see Him when I pray to Him so much?" Sri Ramakrishna asked with a smile, "Do you really consider Him as dear to your heart as your own children?" "No, sir," said Balaram after a moment's pause, "I never felt for Him so strongly." The Master said in an animated voice, "Pray to God, thinking Him as dearer than your own self. Verily, I tell you, He is most attached to His devotees. He cannot but reveal Himself to them. He comes to man before he is sought. There is none more intimate and more affectionate than God." Balaram got new light from these words. "Every word of what he says," he thought within himself, "is true. Nobody ever spoke to me so forcibly of God." The kindness of the Master appealed to Balaram even more than his words. Intuitively he found in the sage of Dakshineswar his monitor and friend. The man and his words made an indelible impression upon his heart. As he bowed reverently before the Master to take his leave, the latter said, "You must come again." Balaram cheerfully agreed. There was nothing else for him to do. He had become infected.

When he returned home his mind was full of thoughts of Dakshineswar. Next morning he went back and found the Master alone. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Well, are you here? Very good. Sit down and have some rest. I was just now thinking of you. Where do you live?" "At Baghbazar," replied Balaram. The Master again said, "And you have come all the way on foot?" "Yes, sir," answered Balaram. The Master then asked him in detail about the members of his family, about his children and other particulars, and at last said, "Look here, Mother has told me that you are one of us. Many things belonging to this place (meaning himself) are in your custody. Buy something and send it here."

Balaram considered this to be his good fortune and willingly obeyed. It was a common practice with Sri Ramakrishna to advise his devotees to bring some small present—no matter if it were only a pice worth of something—when visiting temples or Sadhus. To devotees who were too poor to spend even this much, he would say, "Why should you spend a pice every time? Just buy a pice worth of betel-nuts and have them cut into pieces. When you come, bring some of these."

Balaram went back to Calcutta to buy some articles for Sri Ramakrishna, who seemed to him to be the most remarkable man he had ever seen. In some respects he strongly resembled Sri Chaitanya, he thought. Had the prophet of Nadia, then, incarnated himself again? Well, he would wait and watch, and not jump to any conclusion. He purchased some food for the Master and returned in a carriage to Dakshineswar. The Master received him cordially and accepted the articles he brought. He recognised Balaram as one of those figures whom he had seen in the procession of Sri Chaitanya in one of his visions some years before at the Panchavati. He loved Balaram dearly and used to say, "Balaram's food is very pure. The members of his family have for generations been devotees and been hospitable to Sadhus and beggars. His father is living a retired life at Vrindaban, where he passes his time in calling upon the Lord. Not only can I take his food, but I take it with relish." Again: "All the members of his family are attuned to the one ideal. From the master and mistress down to the children, all are devoted to God. They never take a drop of water without saying their prayers. They are as hospitable as they are pious." Needless to say that the Master felt quite happy in this pious household. In fact, he took his noon meal, consisting of rice, at this home, which was rather unusual, as Balaram was not a Brahmin, but a Kâyastha. Of course the food was consecrated to Jagannath—Balaram's family Deity. From the day he first met the Master to the day of the Master's death Balaram bore practically the entire expenses of his food. And Sri Ramakrishna used Balaram's house at 57, Râmkânta Bose's Street, Baghbazar, as a retreat whenever he had to spend the day or night in Calcutta.

Balaram visited Dakshineswar nearly every day, never missing an opportunity to go there. He found that the Master took an equal interest in all forms of divine manifestation—that he shed tears as much at the name of Kali and Shiva, as that of Radha and Krishna, and that he fell into Samadhi while speaking or thinking of Brahman without attributes. His love for God was as intense as it was broad. Balaram was more and more astonished as this wonderful personality was revealed to him. One day at his house he heard the Master making the following impassioned appeal to Kali the Mother: "O Mother, I throw myself upon Thy mercy—keep me in constant thought of Thee! I seek not, Mother, the pleasures of the senses, I seek not fame. Nor do I long for supernatural powers. What I pray for is pure love for Thee, love untainted by desires, without alloy—love that seeks not the things of the world! Grant likewise, O Mother, that Thy child, bewitched by the fascinations of the world, may never forget Thee! Oh, grant that I may never have a love for lust and wealth! Seest Thou not Divine Mother, that I have none else in the world but Thee! I know not how to chant Thy name. Devoid am I of devotion, of knowledge, too, that leads to Thee, and of genuine love. Oh, vouchsafe unto me that love out of Thy infinite mercy!" Balaram had never heard such a soul-stirring prayer before. He was deeply moved.

His mind gradually underwent a great transformation. Following the instructions of Sri Ramakrishna, he made steady progress on the path of spirituality. He outgrew the cumbrous paraphernalia of external worship, tasted the essence of divine love and completely surrendered himself to the will of God. Charmed by contact with the Master, he introduced other members of his family to him.

Balaram was a staunch believer in non-killing. He could not even kill the mosquitoes that disturbed him at the time of meditation. One day, however, he was in rather a rationalistic mood, and thought that concentration of mind was the chief thing in religion. If, therefore, he could make his meditation steady by killing a few mosquitoes, he should not shrink from doing so. But it is not so easy to get rid of deep-rooted convictions. He still had his doubts, and to settle them, thought it best to consult Sri Ramakrishna. On his way to Dakshineswar he tried to recollect whether he had ever seen the Master killing any pests. But he could not recall any such instance. On the contrary, he thought him to be a stricter observer of non-killing than himself. Why, he was the very personification of this virtue! So Balaram thought that his own mind must have deceived him and that it was useless to refer to him. But when he came to the Master's door, he saw a strange spectacle. There was Sri Ramakrishna picking bugs from his pillow and killing them one by one! As he approached and saluted, the Master said, "The pillow has a lot of bugs. Their bites distract the mind. So I am killing them." So it was that Balaram was answered.

BABURAM AND NIRANJAN

Bâburâm Ghosh first met the Master in a Hari-Sabhâ in Calcutta, where the latter went to hear the chanting of the *Bhagavata*. Some time before, he had heard from his elder brother about a monk in Dakshineswar, who, like Sri Gaurânga, lost all consciousness of the world while uttering the name of God. On being asked if he would like to see the Sadhu, Baburam agreed. He was a class-mate of Rakhal, who, he knew, used to visit Dakshineswar. Next day he asked his friend about the saint, and it was settled that on the following Saturday they should go together to see him. On the appointed day they set out by boat and were joined on the way by a friend named Râmdayâl Chakravarti, who used to visit the Master. Rakhal inquired of Baburam if he would like to stay for the night. Baburam thought they were going to a monk who lived in a hut, and replied, "Will there be accommodation for us?" Rakhal only said, "There may be." The question of food troubled Baburam, and he asked, "What shall we eat at night? There are shops there, I hope?" Rakhal simply said, "We shall manage somehow."

At sunset they reached the temple. Baburam was fascinated with the beauty of the place. It looked like fairyland. They entered Sri Ramakrishna's room, but he was not there. Rakhal said to them, "He has gone to the Kali temple. Please wait here a little and I shall call him." He hurried to the temple and in a few minutes was seen leading Sri Ramakrishna by the hand. The Master was in a state of God-intoxication, and

Rakhal was carefully directing his staggering steps, warning him of the high and low places. Reaching his room he sat a while on the small bedstead, and presently regained normal consciousness. He inquired about the new-comer. Ramdayal introduced him. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Ah, you are a relative of Balaram. Then you are related to us also. Well, what is your native place?"

Baburam: "Ântpur, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah, then I must have visited it. Kali and Bhulu of Jhamapukur also hail from that place, don't they?"

Baburam: "Yes, sir. But how do you know them?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why, they are sons of Râmprasâd Mitra. When I was at Jhamapukur, I used to go frequently to their house as well as to that of Digambar Mitra."

Saying this the Master caught hold of Baburam's hand and said, "Come closer to the light. Let me see your face." In the dim light of an earthen lamp he carefully studied the face. He was satisfied with the results of the examination, nodding his head in approbation. Then he examined the boy's arms and legs. Finally he said, "Let me see your palm." He looked at it and placed it upon his own, as if to weigh it. Then he said, "All right, all right." Turning to Ramdayal he said, "Do you know how Naren is? I heard that he was a bit indisposed."

Ramdayal: "I hear that he is well."

Sri Ramakrishna: "He has not come here for a long time, and I feel a great longing to see him. Will you ask him to come here one day? You won't forget it?"

Ramdayal: "I shall ask him positively."

It was about 10 o'clock. Ramdayal had brought a large quantity of food for Sri Ramakrishna who took only a part of it, arranging the rest to be distributed among the three devotees. Then the Master asked them where they preferred to sleep—in his room or outside. Rakhal chose inside; but Baburam thought that his presence might disturb the meditation of the saint; so he and Ramdayal decided to sleep outside, though the Master invited them to remain within. It was the month of April. The two devotees had hardly fallen asleep when they were roused by the cry of guards. Presently Sri Ramakrishna approached them reeling like a drunkard, with his cloth under his arm. Addressing Ramdayal he said, "Hullo, are you asleep?" "No, sir," was the reply. Then the Master said with great eagerness, "Please tell him to come. I felt as if somebody were wringing my heart like this," and he twisted his cloth. His every word and gesture expressed the unspeakable agony of heart at the separation from Narendra Nath. "What love!" Baburam thought: "But how queer that he does not respond!" Sri Ramakrishna proceeded a few steps towards his room. Then he returned and said to Ramdayal, "Then don't forget to tell him about it." He repeated these words and went back to his bed with staggering gait. About an hour after, he again appeared and unburdened his mind to Ramdayal, "Look here, he is very pure. I look upon him as the manifestation of Narayana, and can't live without him. His absence is wringing my heart like this," and he again twisted his cloth. Then he said in bitter anguish, "I am being put on the rack, as it were, for his sake. Let him come here just once!" This scene was repeated at hourly intervals throughout the night.

When Baburam met Sri Ramakrishna the next morning, he found him quite a different man. There was no trace of anxiety on his face. He asked Baburam to walk around the Panchavati.

Baburam was about twenty years of age although he appeared to be much younger and very handsome. In his childhood, if any one teased him about marriage, he would lisp, "Oh, I shall die then." At eight years his ideal was to lead a life of renunciation in a hut shut out from public view by a thick wall of trees, with a fellow monk. When he saw the Panchavati, he was surprised to find that it tallied exactly with his boyish dreams. How could he have foreshadowed the picture so accurately? He, however, kept this to himself and returned to Sri Ramakrishna. In response to a question as to how he liked the place, he only said it was nice. The Master then asked him to visit the Kali temple, which he did. When he took his leave of Sri Ramakrishna, the latter affectionately asked him to come again.

Baburam was greatly impressed. "He is an exceptionally good man," he thought, "and dearly loves Naren. But strange that Naren does not go to see him." The next Sunday at 8 o'clock he again came to Dakshineswar. A few devotees were seated before the Master. Sri Ramakrishna welcomed him and said, "It is nice that you have come. Go to the Panchavati, where they are having a picnic. And Narendra has come. Have a talk with him." At the Panchavati Baburam found Rakhal, who introduced him to Narendra and some other young devotees of the Master, who had assembled there. From the first Baburam was filled with admiration for Narendra. To look at him was to love him. Narendra was talking with his friends. Presently he burst into a song which charmed Baburam. With bated breath he listened saying to himself, "Ah, how versatile he is!"

Baburam began to associate closely with Sri Ramakrishna and soon surrendered himself at his feet for ever. The Master had a very high opinion of him. He knew him to be absolutely pure and classed him among the Nitya-siddhas and the Ishwarakotis. In a vision he saw Baburam as a goddess with a necklace. This gave him an inkling as to the personality of this disciple. "It is a new vessel, and milk can be put into it without fear of turning"—this was what he used to say of this boy. Owing to his absolute purity Baburam was deemed a fit attendant for the Master, who liked to have him about. He would often fall into Samadhi when he touched the boy. His mother was a great devotee, and when Sri Ramakrishna asked her to leave her son in his care, she gave her ungrudging consent. Baburam was one of those fortunate souls whose touch the Master could bear at the time of Samadhi, and many were the occasions when he was found supporting Sri Ramakrishna in that state lest he should fall and be injured. The Master, from the very beginning, treated him as his own, and took great pains to help him to realise God. Once the boy pressed him hard for the experience of Bhava, that absorption in God which is the maturity of devotion. Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother for this, but was told that Baburam would get the monistic experience (Jnana) instead of Bhava. This delighted the Master.

One day Hazra, in his characteristic way, was advising Baburam and some other young boys to ask of Sri Ramakrishna something tangible in the shape of powers, instead of, as was their wont, merely living a jolly life with him with plenty of good things to eat. Sri Ramakrishna, who was near, scented mischief-making, and calling Baburam to his side said, "Well, what can you ask? Isn't everything that I have yours already? Yes, everything I have earned in the shape of realisations is for the sake of you all. So get rid of the idea of begging, which alienates by creating distance. Rather realise your kinship to me and gain the key to all that treasure." In a thousand ways such as this, the Master, like a watchful mother, trained the young souls under his care, so that they might develop without selfishness.

Another young devotee of extraordinary spirituality came to Sri Ramakrishna and found in him his ideal. It was Nitya Niranjan Ghosh, for shortness called Niranjan. He was eighteen years of age and a medium for a group of spiritualists in Calcutta. He heard from people about the great spiritual power of Sri Ramakrishna and one day came to Dakshineswar to see him. As usual, a number of devotees were assembled to whom the Master was talking. Towards evening, when the gathering had dispersed, he turned to Niranjan and asked all particulars about him. He spoke quite familiarly with the boy, as if he were an old acquaintance. Finally he said, "My boy, if you think always of ghosts, you will become a ghost, and if you think of God, you will become God. Now, which do you prefer?" "Well, of course the latter," replied the boy. Then Sri Ramakrishna advised him to sever all connection with spiritualists, to which Niranjan agreed. As it was getting dark, the Master invited him to spend the night at Dakshineswar, rather than walk the long distance home. Niranjan said his uncle would be anxious, and took leave of the Master, promising to come another day.

The visit, though brief, profoundly impressed the boy. In the midst of his daily occupations his mind flew often to Dakshineswar. Two or three days after, he went again. The Master was filled with joy at seeing him and embracing him warmly said, "Niranjan, my boy, the days are flying fast. When will you realise God? This life will be in vain if you do not realise Him. When will you devote your mind wholly to God! Oh, how anxious I am for you!" The boy was surprised. "A strange man this," he thought, "why is he so anxious for my spiritual welfare?" He could not find an answer to the question, but the words of the Master appealed to him more forcibly than any he had ever heard. He spent the night there and the two following days. When he returned home, his uncle, who had been extremely anxious about him, took him to task and put him under strict surveillance. Niranjan was much aggrieved at being debarred from visiting Dakshineswar. But afterwards his uncle relented and gave him freedom to go to Dakshineswar when he liked.

In the course of a few days Niranjan recognised his relationship with Sri Ramakrishna, and the latter took him as one of his own. His striking simplicity, his heroic scorn for the temptations of the world, and the innate purity of his nature made him highly beloved of the Master, who found in him the marks of an Ishwarakoti. When pressed about marriage by his relatives, the boy told them that they simply wanted to bring him to ruin. Needless to say, the Master was highly pleased to hear of this bold reply and often praised Niranjan before others saying, "He is a fortunate man who is not at all attached to the world. I see Niranjan seated on a ball of light. He does not care for anything in the world. When the call to leave it comes, he will do so without a moment's hesitation."

Niranjan was of a violent temper and often resorted to drastic measures for the righting of wrongs. One day, on his way to Dakshineswar in a country-boat, some of his fellow passengers began to speak ill of Sri Ramakrishna. Niranjan at first strongly protested against this, but finding it had no effect, decided to teach them a lesson. He began to rock the boat violently thundering out that he would drown them all in midstream for their misconduct. His robust frame and furious mood cowed the offenders. They apologised for their foolishness, which ended the matter. When Sri Ramakrishna heard of this incident, he rebuked Niranjan for his violent temper. "Anger is a deadly sin," he said, "and why should you be subject to it? The indignation of a good man is like a line drawn on water. It vanishes at once. Foolish people say all sorts of things. You should ignore them completely as beneath your notice. If, instead, you fight with them, you will have to spend all your life doing that. Just fancy what harm you were about to do in the heat of the moment!"

At one time Niranjan was compelled to accept a situation in an office. Sri Ramakrishna was grieved at the news and remarked, "I would not have been more pained had I heard of his death!" A few days after, when he met Niranjan, he found that he had been compelled to accept the job in order to maintain his aged mother. With a sigh of relief Sri Ramakrishna said, "Ah, then it is all right. It won't contaminate your mind. But I tell you, if you had done so for your own sake, I could not have touched you. Really it was unthinkable that you could stoop to such humiliation. Didn't I know that my Niranjan had not the least trace of impurity in him?"[1] Hearing this remark, one among the audience said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Sir, you are depreciating service in very strong terms. But how can one maintain one's family without earning money?" The Master replied, "Let him who likes do so. I don't dissuade everyone. I say this only to these young aspirants who form a class by themselves." Niranjan, as we shall see, did not work long, for he soon dedicated himself entirely to the service of the Master.

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[1] 'Niranjan' literally means 'untainted'.

MAHENDRA NATH GUPTA

It was in March 1882, that Mahendra Nath Gupta, better known as Master Mahâshay, or M., first met Sri Ramakrishna. He was a Brahmo by faith and the Headmaster of the Vidyâsâgar High School at Shyâmbâzâr, Calcutta. One evening accompanied by a friend he came to visit Rasmani's temple-garden. Wondering at the beauty of the place, he stopped before Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master was on his cot, and the devotees were sitting on the floor, listening to him. Mahendra was charmed with what he heard. Everything about the place appeared beautiful to him. He took a stroll round and returned to Sri Ramakrishna's room. The fragrance of incense was coming out through the closed door. Ascertaining from a maidservant that he might go in, Mahendra with his friend entered the room. The master was alone. Mahendra saluted him with folded hands and was asked to sit down. Sri Ramakrishna then inquired about his occupation, where he resided, and one or two other points. Mahendra noticed, however, that now and then the Master was absent-minded. Later on he came to know that this was a state of God-consciousness. He said to the Master, "Perhaps this is your prayer-time. We should take our leave now." Sri Ramakrishna replied in an abstracted mood, "Well, no—not exactly that." Presently they left. The Master asked them to come again.

The next morning Mahendra went again to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna greeted him with his usual affability and began to talk with him. Among other things, he inquired after Keshab's health and said how anxious he had been for his recovery. Then he asked, "Are you married?"

Mahendra: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (with a start to Ramlal): "Ah, he is already married!"

Mahendra was ashamed. He thought, "Is it so bad to marry?" Sri Ramakrishna asked, "Have you any children?" Mahendra said apologetically, "Yes, sir." The Master was sorry to hear the news. Mahendra for the first time heard that he had not led an exemplary life. His previous notions received a rude shock. After a while the Master said to him with a kindly look, "Well, there are some good signs on your body. I can tell them from one's forehead and eyes." "Well," he added after a pause, "what do you think of your wife? Is she possessed of attributes leading Godward or the opposite?"

Mahendra: "She is good, but she is ignorant."

Sri Ramakrishna (sharply): "And you are wise!"

This was a severe blow to Mahendra's ideas about himself. Sri Ramakrishna asked him, "What aspect of God appeals to you—with form or without form?" Mahendra was puzzled to think how He could be both, as it involved a contradiction. But he answered, "His formless aspect, sir." "Very well," said the Master, "one should hold to one ideal. It is excellent that you believe in the Impersonal God. But you must not have the idea that your view alone is right and all others are wrong. You must know that both aspects are equally true. You stick to that one which you like." Mahendra was surprised to hear this; nevertheless he argued the point.

Mahendra: "Taking it for granted that God is with form, He cannot of course be the clay image—?"

Sri Ramakrishna (interrupting): "Of course not. He is embodied consciousness."

Mahendra: "Well, sir, is it not our duty to make it clear to the image-worshippers that the clay image is not God? That they should worship God in and through that image?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Bah, it has come to be the fashion with you Calcutta people to lecture and teach others. Why don't you teach yourselves first? Who are you to teach others? The Lord of the universe will look to that—the Lord who has created this world, who has made the sun and moon, man and beast; He has provided for the subsistence of His creatures; He has created parents who love their offspring;—He will do the teaching. He has provided for so many things, and will He not arrange to bring men to light if need be? He is the inmost Self of all, and if there has been anything wrong in worshipping the clay image, does He not know that people are thereby calling on Him only? He will be satisfied with that very form of worship. Why do you trouble your head about that? You had better try to attain knowledge and devotion yourself."

These animated words touched Mahendra's heart and conquered his egotism. This was his first and last attempt to argue with the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna: "You were referring to the worship of a clay image. Even that has its use. It is God who has provided for so many forms of worship. He has made all this to suit different grades of aspirants. The mother prepares different kinds of food for her children, according to their power of assimilation.

"A mother has five children. A fish has been brought, and out of it she has prepared several dishes, to suit different stomachs. For one she has cooked Polâo (which is a very rich dish), for another a sour preparation, for a third a hot curry, for a fourth fish fry, and so on—according to their taste and capacity to digest. Do you see the point?"

Mahendra was convinced. He then asked how one might turn one's mind to God.

Sri Ramakrishna: "One must constantly take the name of God and sing His praises. One should also associate at intervals with genuine devotees or monks. The mind is not inclined to God if one lives always in the world, amid worldly pursuits. It is extremely necessary to resort now and then to solitude and meditate on Him. Without this it is most difficult at the initial stage to engage the mind in God."

Mahendra: "How should one live in the world?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Go on with all your duties, but fix the mind on God. Live with all—wife, children, parents—and serve them as if they were your most intimate relatives. But in your heart you should know that none of them belongs to you.

"A maidservant in a rich family attends to all her duties, but her heart is on her home in her native place. Again, she looks after her master's children as if they were her own, and says, 'My Ram', or 'My Hari'. But she knows quite well they are not hers.

"If before attaining devotion you try to mix with the world, you will be all the more entangled. You will be upset by dangers, grief, and mortification. And the more you will dwell on worldly things, the greater will be your attachment.

"Smear your fingers with oil if you want to open the jack-fruit, or the milky exudation will stick to them. Devotion to God is like this oil.

"But to attain this devotion solitude is required. For churning butter one must set the curd in a quiet place. The curd won't set if it is removed from one place to another. Next, sitting in a quiet place and disengaging yourself from other work, you have to churn the curd. Then you get the butter.

"The world is like water and the mind like milk. If you put milk in water, they get mixed up and you can't separate the two. But if you make curd out of the milk and churn that into butter, you may put it in water and it will float. Therefore you must first churn the butter of knowledge and devotion through practice in solitude. Then if you put it in the water of the world, it won't mix up, but will float.

"At the same time you must discriminate that lust and wealth are unreal and God alone is real. What is money worth? It gives us food and clothing and a place to live in—that's all. But it does not help us to realise God. So money cannot be the end of life. This is what is called discrimination."

Mahendra: "Sir, is it possible for one to see God?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Undoubtedly. Retiring now and then to solitude, taking His name and singing His praises, and discrimination—these are the means."

Mahendra: "Under what circumstances can one see Him?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "One can see Him if one weeps for Him with a great intensity of heart. People shed jugfuls of tears for their wife or children, or for money; but who cares to weep for God? One must pray to Him with the required degree of intensity."

The Master then burst into a song—"Pray to Her with real longing, and see if you don't realise Her." After this he continued:

"As soon as you have this yearning, it means that the rosy dawn is already in sight, and the sun will soon be up. Immediately after yearning, comes realisation.

"The thing is, we must love God—as a mother loves her child, as a devoted wife loves her husband, and a worldly man loves his property. If one's love for God equals the sum total of those three, one can realise Him.

"We must pray to Him with a yearning heart. The kitten knows only how to mew. It remains wherever its mother places it, sometimes in the kitchen, sometimes on the ground, or sometimes on a bed. When it feels pain it only mews—it knows nothing else. And the mother comes from wherever she may be, attracted by this mewing."

Next Sunday Mahendra went again to Dakshineswar. He could think of nothing but Sri Ramakrishna since his last visit. The Master was talking with Narendra about seeing God in everything and of different types of men, paying a tribute to those who never get attached to the world. This day Mahendra was blessed with a sight of the Master's Samadhi. The next day he came again; and as he stepped into the room, Sri Ramakrishna said with a hearty laugh to Narendra and others, "Well, a peacock was given a dose of opium at four o'clock. The next day it appeared again precisely at that hour. It was under the spell of opium and came for another dose!" (Laughter.)

The Master then began to joke with the boys, making them rock with laughter. Mahendra wondered if this could be the same man whom on the previous day he had seen immersed in Samadhi. Presently the devotion of Hanumân was discussed, and Sri Ramakrishna, in the course of singing a song on that subject, fell into Samadhi. After some minutes the tension slackened, the body lost its stiffness, the face became smiling, and the senses resumed their functions. He was uttering the sweet name of Rama, and tears were trickling down his cheeks. All these various changing moods of the Master puzzled Mahendra.

Mahendra soon became one of Sri Ramakrishna's most devoted disciples and tried to be present wherever the Master was. He began to take notes of the Master's conversations and was instrumental in introducing many of his students and relatives to Sri Ramakrishna, thus changing their lives. Not only did he frequent Dakshineswar, but at one time he spent many days there, practising religious exercises under the direct guidance of the Master.

Mahendra's intimate relationship with the Master can be realised from the following words which the latter addressed to him:

"Mother shows me everything beforehand. In the Panchavati I saw the Sankirtana of Sri Gauranga. In that procession I think I saw you as well as Balaram.

"I have come to know who you are, by listening to your recital of the *Chaitanya Bhagavata.* You are of my own group—of the same stuff—like a father and his son. So long as you did not come here, you forgot yourself. Now you will know your real nature. The Lord Himself comes in the form of a Guru and teaches everything.

"The 'naked one' (Totapuri) told me a story. Once a tigress attacked a flock of goats. A hunter saw her from a distance and shot her. She was with young and gave birth to a cub as she expired. The cub grew up with the goats, and learned to graze and bleat like them; it even ran away like them when attacked by an enemy. One day a huge tiger came upon the flock as it was grazing. To his surprise he saw a tiger grazing with it. Disregarding the goats he seized this tiger, which began to bleat and tried to run away. Dragging it to a pool of water he said, 'Look at your face in the water. See, it is like mine.' Then he forced some meat into its mouth. At first it refused to eat it, but when it got the taste, it ate. Then the strange tiger said, 'You have been living with goats and grazing like them! Shame on you!'

"Grazing is being satisfied with lust and wealth, and bleating and fleeing like the goats is behaving like vulgar people. To go away with the tiger means to take refuge in the Guru who illumines the heart, and to know him as one's very own. To see the face truly reflected in water is to know one's real nature."

Seeing Mahendra's rationalistic turn of mind Sri Ramakrishna would warn him against vain disputation. "It is no good arguing too much," he said: "First, God, and then, the world. One can easily know the world after realising God. Therefore I say, do not argue any more. If you do, you will be a loser. Some time I used to walk alone at night weeping and saying, 'O Mother, blast my tendency to disputation!' Promise that you won't argue any more."

Mahendra agreed. The Master added: "I wept and prayed, 'O Mother, teach me what is written in the Vedas and the Vedanta, in the Puranas and the Tantras.' And one by one She has shown me everything."

YOGINDRA NATH

About the year 1882 another young man of surpassing religious merit found his haven of peace at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. This was Yogindra Nath, the eldest son of Nabin Chandra Ray Chaudhury, who came of an aristocratic Brahmin family of Dakshineswar and was a man of the orthodox type. He owned very little property, and his only hope lay in his promising son, Yogin, who might one day be able to shoulder the responsibilities of his father. Yogin developed a religious tendency very early in life. Even when he was a child of five, he was often overwhelmed by strange feelings. In the midst of play a serious thought would suddenly cloud his face, and he would lose all interest in the sport. He would withdraw into a quiet corner and looking at the sky think, "Where am I? Certainly I don't belong here. These are not my playmates—I have other friends and companions. I must have come from one of those stars. But which one? I don't know. And why am I here if I belong to another world? Is this all a dream?" Thoughts like these would trouble him, and he would be seized with a hankering for familiar regions. As he grew up, however, these boyish imaginations gradually left him. He envinced particular zeal in worship, often spending two or three hours daily in meditation. He was reading in a missionary school, but liked sacred books better than his text-books. He was still in High School when he met Sri Ramakrishna.

Yogin used to visit the garden of Rani Rasmani. One evening he found that a large concourse of men had gathered in and about a certain room in that garden, and were listening to something within with rapt attention. He had heard that an eccentric Brahmin who had formerly been a priest in that temple, lived there. Yogin was curious to know what was going on, and drawing near the door listened attentively. From the first few words that fell on his ears he understood that he whom local opinion nicknamed "the mad priest" was talking. In simple and homely language he was explaining the philosophy of love. Yogin was caught in the spell of the words and stood transfixed. When the meeting dispersed Yogin went home, saying to himself, "This man must be a saint who has seen God. People do not understand this and, therefore, they laugh at him. How else can one account for such words of devotion, such divine love, and such ecstasy in the name of God? However, let me watch him more closely."

The next day he went straight to Sri Ramakrishna, who was glad to learn who he was. He said, "Well, you come of a family which is well known to me. Formerly I often went to your house to hear the *Bhagavata* and other scriptures." He mentioned some elderly members who were very kind to him, and said, "It is well that we have come to know each other now. You must come often. You are born in a noble family and are possessed of many characteristics of spiritual greatness. You will easily advance on this path."

Yogin was deeply impressed by the Master's kind treatment and visited him daily. He kept this a secret from his parents, for they shared the common belief about the Master. To throw them off the scent, he used to collect choice flowers for his father's worship. This contact with Sri Ramakrishna brought about a revolution in his ideas. The attainment of God became the sole object of his life. Though he knew that his academic studies would be of ultimate financial value to his family, yet he would not give his attention to the world, for he had learned from Sri Ramakrishna that through the renunciation of lust and wealth alone lay the path to the realisation of God. At first he tried to reconcile both God and Mammon; when unsuccessful, he gave up the attempt. He resolved not to marry. He would seek a job away from home and thus help the family. This arrangement, he thought, would enable him to pass most of his time in prayer and meditation. Thus determined, he said one day to his father, "It is useless for me to go to school any more. Rather I shall try to secure an appointment in some office. With your permission I shall go to my uncle at Kânpur and try for a post." His father acquiesced and sent him there.

But Yogin could not secure an appointment. So he spent most of his time in prayer and meditation. His absent-mindedness alarmed his uncle, who wrote to Yogin's father urging him to give his son in marriage. Nabin Chandra thought that to be the wise thing to do and made arrangements for the marriage without telling Yogin, lest he runs away. Nabin had learned this from a former experience. He then wrote to his brother-in-law to send Yogin home on the pretext of his mother's illness. With an anxious heart Yogin came home, only to find everybody jubilant over his coming marriage. He was shocked. He told his father plainly that he was opposed to marriage. His father tried to persuade him, but he remained obdurate. Nabin was in an awkward position, for he had given his word to the bride's father. It would be utterly disgraceful to withdraw now. At last Yogin's mother came and, with tears in her eyes, implored her son to marry and save his father's reputation. "Even if you are unwilling, marry for my sake, dear," she said. The mother's passionate appeal undermined the son's firm resolution. Yogin bowed his head before the decree of fate and was married.

Though he did it for the satisfaction of his mother, yet he understood what it meant for him. His marriage had ruined all his religious prospects, and besides had raised an insurmountable barrier between himself and Sri Ramakrishna. With drooping spirits he said to himself, "Who is more wretched than the man who cannot keep his promise. Will Sri Ramakrishna love me as before? He is the embodiment of renunciation, and I shall have to pass my days in pursuit of sense-gratifications! Of what use is my going to him any more? He marked out the path of spirituality for me, but I could not follow it. I told him of my desire to lead a celibate life, and I remember with what joy he hailed it. How can I appear before him now?" His heart sank within him as he surveyed his position. He decided not to see Sri Ramakrishna again, and tried to divert his mind with business.

The Master heard about the marriage and was desirous of seeing the boy. He sent for him repeatedly, but Yogin did not come. Everyone said that he was different since his marriage. As Yogin disregarded his repeated summons, Sri Ramakrishna one day called one of Yogin's friends to him and said, "What sort of a man is Yogin? Before he left for Kânpur, he took some money from a temple officer, of which he neither gives any account nor does he come himself, even though sent for. Will you please go and tell him this?" Yogin remembered that he had been given a few rupees to purchase some things. The articles had been sent long ago, but he still retained the change consisting of a few annas. At first he thought of returning them personally, but after his marriage he decided not to visit Sri Ramakrishna again and was on the look-out for someone through whom he could return the money. Sri Ramakrishna's complaint cut him to the quick. He said to himself, "True, I may have lost all hope, but I am not so far gone as to become a swindler. Does he really consider me so low as that? All right, I shall go and return those annas this very day."

That very afternoon Yogin started for Rani Rásmani's garden, and as he was reflecting on his hard lot, he came to the eastern verandah of Sri Ramakrishna's room, whence he saw the Master seated on his small bedstead, with his cloth thrown carelessly on his lap. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw Yogin, he rushed forward to meet him, holding the cloth under his arm like a boy. His face shone with unusual radiance, as if he were brimming over with divine power! Catching hold of the boy's hand he said, "What if you are married? Haven't I, too, been married? What is there to be afraid of in that? (Putting his hand on his own chest) If this (meaning himself) is propitious, even a hundred thousand marriages will be powerless to affect you. If you desire to be in the world, bring your wife here one day, and I shall turn her mind in such a way that she will be ever a help to you in your spiritual progress. But if you are averse from a householder's life, I shall devour your attachment to the world." He was emitting fire!

Yogin was stupefied. What was this that he heard? Was it possible? He felt himself suddenly transported from a region of utter despair to one of bright hope. Was it for this that Sri Ramakrishna had accused him, that he might get him to come to see him? A dead weight was lifted from his heart, and he breathed freely again. The Master did not speak a word about the money, and on Yogin's referring to it he said, "Leave it in that broken tin box."

Under the eyes of the Master, Yogin passed his days happily, adding new strength to his spirit of renunciation. The cloud that had gathered in his mind vanished completely, and life again appeared worth living. His parents murmured at his indifference to the world. One day his mother said, "If you don't care to earn money, well, why did you marry?" "Didn't I tell you again and again," replied Yogin, "that I had no intention of marrying? But I had to give way to your tears." "What do you mean?" exclaimed the mother: "How could you marry unless you had the desire to do so?" Yogin stared at her. "Gracious God!" he said to himself, "I committed the act to please my mother, and now she talks like this! Fie on the world! Sri Ramakrishna is the only person I have met, whose words and thoughts tally exactly." From that day he was disgusted with the world, and finding his only solace in the company of Sri Ramakrishna, spent the days and sometimes the nights, in the temple-garden.

The Master was not slow to detect Yogin's one great failing—his extreme softness of heart. He warned the boy against this weakness. One day Yogin was sent to the market to buy a pan. He appealed to the religious feeling of the shopkeeper and asked him to supply a good article. The purchase finished, he returned home. But it was afterwards found that the pan had a crack in it. When the Master heard of it, he said to Yogin reproachfully, "A devotee must not be a fool. A shopkeeper is not thinking of God at all when dealing with his customers. In trusting him you acted stupidly. You should have examined the pan before purchasing it. See that you be not deceived thus in future. When you go out shopping, first know the real price by going round several shops, and thoroughly examine the thing before you buy. And don't fail to demand the little extras where allowable." Is it not marvellous to hear such advice from a man who, perhaps a minute before, had been plunged into the bliss of Samadhi? But Sri Ramakrishna was full of such contrasts.

Yogin was gentle to a fault. One day Sri Ramakrishna found a cockroach among his clothes. He asked Yogin to take it outside and kill it. The boy took it to some distance and let it go. The Master inquired if he had carried out the order. Yogin told him what he had done. Thereupon Sri Ramakrishna rebuked him saying, "I told you to kill it, and you let it go! You must carry out my orders to the very letter, or you will have to repent in more serious matters."

Another day Yogin was in a boat on his way to Dakshineswar. One of the passengers, when he learned of Yogin's destination, began to vilify Sri Ramakrishna, even calling him names. Yogin was mortified and was on the point of launching into a vindication of the Master, when he realised that it was ignorance of the Master's real nature that prompted the criticism. So he decided to say nothing. On reaching Dakshineswar, he narrated the incident to Sri Ramakrishna. He thought that the Master would simply laugh. But to his surprise he said, "The man abused me, and you pocketed the insult without a murmur! Do you know what the scriptures advise in such a case? One should either kill the vilifier or leave the place at once. And you bore it tamely!" It was to put some mettle into the boy that the Master treated the incident thus.

The reader will remember in this connection the very different advice he gave to another disciple of his, viz Niranjan, on a similar occasion. It was his idea to lead the boys in his charge to perfect harmony, of which his own life was the brilliant example. So we find him putting mettle into the one and toning down the fiery nature of the other. The prescriptions in both cases were suited to the nature of the disease.

As already remarked, Sri Ramakrishna often encouraged his disciples to test him before accepting him as their guide. He always advised them to notice if the religious teacher practised what he preached. One evening, Yogin, with the Master's permission, decided to spend the night with him, with a view to serving him if needful. They went to bed. At midnight Yogin suddenly woke up to find the door of the room open and Sri Ramakrishna absent. At first he thought that he might be walking outside. But he was not. Suddenly a suspicion came to his mind—could he have gone to see his wife? Could it possibly be that his actions were contrary to his teachings? Unpleasant though the thought was, he resolved to ascertain the truth, and he kept watch upon the door of the concert-room, where the Holy Mother lived. Suddenly he heard the sound of slippers from the direction of the Panchavati. A moment later Sri Ramakrishna stood by his side. "Well, what do you want here?" he asked. Yogin hung his head in shame for having doubted the Master, and could not utter a word. The Master understood at once and relieved the boy by saying, "Well done. You must examine a Sadhu by day and by night before believing in him." Though forgiven, Yogin could not sleep any more that night.

According to the rules of the Kali temple, every day Sri Ramakrishna received a portion of the offerings made to the deities. One morning he found that his share had not been sent to his room. This irregularity disturbed him, so that he himself went to the office to inquire about it. Yogin was surprised at this, for he knew the Master did not care much about eating. It was inexplicable to him, except as a remnant of the priestly instinct to exact what was one's due. He was amused at the thought that in spite of his great realisations, the Master could not overcome the petty tendencies of his class. At this moment Sri Ramakrishna returned and said, "Look here, Rani Rasmani has bequeathed her large estate to the service of this temple, so that the offerings may be distributed among devotees and Sadhus. That part of the offerings which comes to this room is taken only by devotees who come here with a yearning for God, and the gift of Rasmani is turned to good account. But what use is made of the other part which goes to the priests of this temple? They sell it in the market, and some even feed their mistresses with it! I fight with the men in charge, for the share that comes here, in order that Rasmani's object may be at least partially fulfilled." And so Yogin discovered that every act of the Master, no matter how trivial it might appear, was freighted with deep significance.

Sri Ramakrishna gave Yogin much liberty, as he knew that the boy was one of the Mother's chosen few. He called him also an Ishwarakoti—a rare distinction to which only half a dozen of the Master's disciples could aspire. Under the loving care of Sri Ramakrishna Yogin grew to be a man who completely triumphed over the sex-idea. He was renunciation personified.

MEETING WITH SOME NOTABLES

Among the notable visitors to Sri Ramakrishna at this period was the famous Ashwini Kumar Datta, the patriot-devotee of Barisal. We give below extracts from his reminiscences of the Master as recorded in a Bengali letter he wrote to M., the writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna:*

It was, perhaps, during the Puja holidays of 1881 that I met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time. Keshab Babu was to come that day. I arrived at Dakshineswar by boat and, going up the steps of the landing ghat, asked someone where the Paramahamsa was living. "There is the Paramahamsa!"—the man replied, pointing to a man reclining against a bolster in the northern verandah facing the garden. When I saw that he wore a black-bordered cloth and reclined in that way, I thought, "What kind of a Paramahamsa can he be?" There he sat leaning against the bolster with his hands clasped across his drawn-up knees. Then I thought, "He evidently is not accustomed to the use of pillows as gentlemen are, so perhaps he is a Paramahamsa." At his right, very near the pillow, sat a gentleman whose name, I learned, was Rajendra Lal Mitra, who afterwards became Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal. A little further off sat some others.

After a few moments, the Master said to Rajendra Babu, "Please see if Keshab is coming." Some one looked and said, "No!" After a brief interval, hearing a sound outside he again said, "Please look once more." Again some one went and came back with the same reply. Then Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said, "The rustling of leaves makes Radha exclaim, "Oh, here comes my Beloved!" You see, Keshab always tantalises me like this!" At twilight Keshab came with his party.

When Keshab bowed before him touching the ground with his forehead, the Master returned the salutation in the same manner. Shortly after, he raised his head and in a state of semi-consciousness said addressing the Mother, "Thou hast brought the entire population of Calcutta here—as if I were going to deliver a lecture! I can't do that! Do it Thyself if Thou likest. I can't do these things!" Still in the ecstatic mood, with a divine smile, he said, "I am Thy child, I'll simply live and move. I'll eat, sleep, and do such trifles, but I can't give lectures." Keshab Babu's heart overflowed with emotion as he looked at Sri Ramakrishna. Seeing the Master in this state I thought, "Can this be pretence?" I had never seen anything like it before, and I am not a credulous man.

Coming back from this exalted state, the Master addressing Keshab said, "Keshab, once when I went to your temple, I heard you say, 'Plunging into the river of devotion, we shall be carried straight to the ocean of Sachchidânanda.' Then I looked up (at the gallery where Keshab's wife and other ladies were sitting) and thought, 'What will become then of these ladies?' You are householders, how can you reach the ocean of Sachchidananda all at once? You are like the mongoose that has a stone tied to its tail. If something happens, it runs up and sits in a niche in the wall. But how can it remain there? The stone pulls it down with a thud to the floor. You may practise a little meditation, but the weight of wife and children will drag you down. You may dive into the river of devotion, but you must come up again,—

dive and come up again. How can you dive once for all?"

"Is it altogether impossible for householders?" Keshab Babu asked. "What about Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore?"

Sri Ramakrishna softly repeated, "Devendra Nath Tagore, Devendra, Devendra," and saluted him several times. Then he said, "His case is similar to that of a man who used to celebrate the Durga Puja with great pomp. Goats would be sacrificed from morning till evening. But after a few years the sacrifice was not so imposing. Then some one said, 'How is it that the sacrifice at your place has become such a tame affair?' 'Why,' the other replied, 'my teeth are gone now!' So it is but natural that at his advanced age Devendra should be practising meditation. But he is a good man for all that.

"You see, so long as a man is under the spell of Maya, he is like a green cocoanut. If you want to use the tender part of it, you cannot help scraping a little of the shell also with it. But the man who has gone beyond Maya is like a ripe cocoanut. The kernel is free from the shell—when you shake it, you know that it is so. The Soul then becomes loose from the body. It is no longer attached to it.

"It is the ego that is the cause of all trouble! The wretched 'I' is almost indestructible. It is like the peepul tree that grows from the rubbish of a dilapidated house. You may cut it down today, but tomorrow you will find it growing from the roots again. The same is the case with the ego. You may wash a cup in which onions have been kept, seven times, but the strong odour remains."

In the course of the conversation he said to Keshab Babu, "Well, Keshab, is it true that your Calcutta

Babus deny the existence of God? One such Babu was going up the stairs. He took one step, but before taking the next one he cried, 'Oh! My side! My side!' and fell unconscious. There was a hue and cry for a doctor. But before he came the man was dead. And such people say, 'There is no God!' "

After an hour or so the Kirtana commenced. What I saw then I shall probably never forget in this life or the life to come. All began to dance, Keshab included, with the Master in the centre and the others in a circle around him. In the course of the dance the Master suddenly stood motionless. He was in Samadhi! It continued for a long time. Hearing and seeing all this, I understood that he was a real Paramahamsa.

Another day, perhaps in 1883, I went to see him with a few young men of Serampore. Seeing them he asked, "Why have they come?"

"To see you," I replied.

Sri Ramakrishna: "What is there to see in me? Why don't they go and see the buildings and temples?"

Myself: "Sir, they have not come to see these things. They have come to see you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Ah! They must be flints then. There's fire in them. You may keep a flint under water for a thousand years, but the moment you strike it, it emits fire. They must be of that type. But if you strike us, it will be in vain."

At this last remark we smiled. I went another day. When I bowed down to him and took my seat, he said, "Can you bring me some of that thing—half-sour, half-sweet—that begins to fizz when you push down the cork?" "You mean lemonade?" I asked. "Yes," he said, "will you bring me that?" I think I brought him a bottle. So far as I remember, he was alone that day. I asked him a few questions.

Myself: "Do you observe caste?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, not much to boast of. I ate a curry at Keshab Sen's house. Let me tell you what happened once. A man with a long beard (a Mohammedan) brought ice for sale, but I was not inclined to take it. A little later, some one brought me a piece of ice from that same man, and I ate it. You see, caste restrictions fall away by themselves. When cocoanut trees and palm-trees grow up, the leaves drop off by themselves. Caste observances go like that. But don't tear them off as those fools do (meaning the violent reformers)."

Myself: "What do you think of Keshab Babu?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Oh, he is a saintly man."

Myself: "And Trailokya Babu?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A fine man and a good singer."

Myself: "And Shivanath Babu?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A good man; but he argues too much!"

Myself: "What difference is there between the Hindus and the Brahmos?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not much. When they play on oboes here, one man holds the same note right along, while another plays different melodies. The Brahmos are harping on the same note—the formless aspect of God; but the Hindus enjoy His various aspects."

I told the Master that I had met Achalânanda Tirthâvadhuta of Barisal. This led to the following conversation :

Sri Ramakrishna: "Isn't that Râmkumâr of Kotrang?"

Myself: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "How did you like him?"

Myself: "I liked him very much."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, whom do you like better, him or me?"

Myself: "How can you draw a comparison? He is a scholar, but are you one?"

The Master was a little puzzled and became silent. A moment later I said, "He may be a scholar, but you are an interesting man. There is great fun in your company." Then he smiled and remarked, "Well said! Well said!"

He asked me, "Have you seen my Panchavati?"

"Yes, sir," I replied.

He told me a little of his religious practices there. He also spoke about Totapuri. Then I asked him, "How can I realise God?"

"Well," he replied, "He is always drawing us as a magnet draws iron. Only when the iron is covered with dirt, it is not attracted. As soon as the dirt is washed off the mind by weeping, it is instantly drawn to Him."

As I was noting down his words, he remarked, "Look here, only crying 'hemp' will not produce intoxication. You must get the hemp, rub it in water and drink it." Later he said, "You have to live in the world. So have your mind slightly intoxicated with the thought of God. While you are at work, let that feeling of inebriation be with you. You cannot, of course, be like Shukadeva and drink and drink till you lose all consciousness of the body.

"If you have to be in the world, give Him power of attorney, make over all your responsibilities to Him. Let Him do as He likes."

All this time the Master was seated on the floor. Now he got up and stretched himself on his cot. Then he said, "Please fan me." I began to fan him, and he was silent. After a while he said, "Oh! It's so hot! Why don't you just dip the fan in water?" I remarked, "Ah, you, too, have your likings!" The Master smiled and said, "Yes,—why—not?" "Very well," I said, "have your full measure of them." I cannot express in words the immense pleasure I derived from his company that day.

When I paid my last visit to him (23rd May, 1885), the Headmaster of our school, who had just then graduated, was with me. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw him, he asked me, "Ah, where did you pick him up? A fine fellow!" Then he continued, "You are a lawyer. And you are so clever! Can you give me a little of that cleverness? The other day your father came and stayed here for three days."

"How did you like him?" I asked.

"A nice man," the Master replied: "But sometimes he talks too much."

I said, "Please help him to get over this tendency when you next meet him." The Master smiled. I asked him to give us some advice. He said, "Do you know Hriday?"

"Your nephew?" I inquired: "I know him only by name." Then he said, "Hriday used to say to me, 'Uncle, please don't exhaust your stock of instructions at once. Why should you repeat the same thing over and over?' I would reply, 'You fool! What's that to you? These are my words, and I shall repeat them a hundred thousand times if I like. You keep quiet'." I smiled and said, "Exactly so."

A little later he got up and, after repeating Om several times, began to sing a song that began: "Dive deep, dive deep, my mind, in the ocean of divine beauty." He had scarcely rendered the first few lines when he himself dived deep and fell into Samadhi!

When the Samadhi was over, he began to pace the room and with both hands pulled up his wearing cloth till it reached the waist. One end of it was trailing on the floor, and the other was hanging loose. Nudging my companion, I whispered, "See how nicely he wears his cloth." A moment later he threw away the cloth with the words, "Ugh! What a nuisance! Off with it!" He began to pace up and down the room. From the northern end he brought a stick and an umbrella and asked, "Do these belong to you?" Scarcely had I replied "No," when he said, "I knew it! I can judge a man by his stick and umbrella. They must belong to that man who was here some time ago and swallowed a lot of food."

He sat down, still nude, on the northern end of his cot, facing the west and began the following conversation:

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, do you consider me ungentlemanly?"

Myself: "Of course not. Why do you ask that?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, Shivanath and others think so. When they come I have to wrap a cloth around me. Do you know Girish Ghosh?"

Myself: "Which Girish Ghosh? He who conducts a theatre?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes."

Myself: "I have never seen him, but I have heard about him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "A good man."

Myself: "They say he drinks."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Let him! How long will he continue that? Do you know Narendra?"

Myself: "No, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I wish very much that you would meet him. He has passed the B.A. examination and is unmarried."

Myself: "Very well, I shall meet him."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Today there will be a Kirtana at Ram Datta's house. You may meet him there. Please go there this evening."

Myself: "All right."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, do. And don't forget."

Myself: "It is your command, and I obey. Surely I'll go."

He showed us the pictures in his room and asked if a picture of Lord Buddha could be had. I answered, "Very likely."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Please let me have one."

Myself: "Yes, I'll bring one when I come again."

But alas! I never had the opportunity.

That evening I went to Ram Babu's house and met Narendra. In one of the rooms Sri Ramakrishna sat reclining against a pillow. Narendra sat at his right, I in front. He asked Narendra to talk with me. But the latter said, "I have a nasty headache today. I don't feel like talking." "Then let us postpone it," I said, "we shall have a chat some other day." And that came to pass in May or June, 1897, at Almora.

Ah! How happily I spent those few days with him! I never met him again after that. It was only the Master's wish that brought us together at Almora.

I met the Master only four or five times. But in that short time we became so intimate that I felt as if we had been class-mates. How much liberty I took while speaking with him! But no sooner had I left his presence than it flashed on me, "Great God! With whom was I speaking?" My whole life has been sweetened by what I received in those few days. The memory of that Elysian smile is still with me, shedding unending bliss.

Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to Pundit Ishwar

Chandra Vidyasagar. The Pundit was far-famed for his great scholarship, which justified his title of Vidyasagar, or "ocean of learning". But even greater than his scholarship was his compassion for suffering humanity. The Master had heard about Vidyasagar's rare parts since his boyhood and was naturally attracted towards him.

In the afternoon of August 5, 1882, Sri Ramakrishna set out for the house of Vidyasagar in a carriage, with Mahendra, Bhavanath, and Hazra. Owing to the dense traffic, the carriage had to stop, when the Master observed a man in another carriage looking at his own socks with an evident satisfaction. The Master was touched and said addressing the Divine Mother, "O Mother, the man hasn't had enough of enjoyment. Do let him enjoy a little."

As he was nearing Vidyasagar's he said to himself several times, "Mother, I am going to see the Pundit; but you know, I am absolutely devoid of learning." His mood became exalted, and he expressed his dislike for worldly topics. The carriage stopped in front of Vidyasagar's house. Sri Ramakrishna alighted, supported by Bhavanath. He wore a red-bordered cloth, the skirt of which was thrown over his shoulder, and a coat which was unbuttoned. As he was going through the garden, he asked Mahendra if he should button his coat. "No, sir," replied Mahendra, "you need not do so." The party reached the first floor of the building, Mahendra introduced the Master to the Pundit, who received him cordially. The Master was in an ecstatic mood and gazed at the Pundit as though he had known him. To control his ecstasy he kept saying at short intervals, "I shall drink some water." In that state he took his seat on a bench, on which a boy was sitting. Sri Ramakrishna moved away from him saying, "Mother, this boy has great attachment to the world."

Vidyasagar ordered some drinking water, and, learning that Sri Ramakrishna had no objection to sweetmeats, brought some. Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees helped themselves. Praising a boy who sat before him, the Master said to Vidyasagar, "This is a good boy, with plenty of virtues in him—like the river Phalgu which looks like a bed of sand but when slightly dug, exposes to view a stream of water running underground."

Then he addressed Vidyasagar with a smile: "To-day I am before the 'ocean'. Up to now I have seen only canals and streams, or at best rivers. But today I see the ocean."

Vidyasagar: "Then, sir, be pleased to take some salt water from it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no, you are not an ocean of that kind. You are not an ocean of Avidyâ (ignorance) but of Vidyâ (knowledge). (Laughter). You are the ocean of milk spoken of in the Puranas."

Vidyasagar: "Well, sir, you may talk as you like."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What you do is Sâttvika (unselfish) work. It is the Râjasika (active) aspect of Sattva. Compassion springs from Sattva. The work that is done out of compassion is a Rajasika work no doubt, but this Rajas is the outcome of Sattva and does no harm. Shukadeva and others did not give up compassion in order to teach mankind about God. You are distributing knowledge and food; this is good. It will help you to realisation if only you can do it disinterestedly. Some work for name or to acquire religious merit. The work of such is not selfless work. Besides you are already a perfected sage (Siddha)."

Vidyasagar: "How, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Potatoes and other vegetables become soft when boiled (Siddha), and you are so tender-hearted—you are so kind!" (Laughter).

Vidyasagar: "But certain things harden when boiled, as for instance, pulse made into pulp." (Laughter).

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no, you are not of that type. Mere scholars are like diseased fruits that will never ripen. They are lost half-way. The vulture soars very high but has its eye on a bit of carrion on the ground. Mere scholars are such only in name, for they are attached to lust and wealth—like vultures they are on the look-out for carrion. Attachment belongs to the realm of nescience (Avidya), while compassion, devotion and renunciation are the glorious offshoots of knowledge (Vidya)."

Everybody listened with rapt attention to his words. He resumed: "Brahman is beyond both Vidya and Avidya. He is beyond Maya. Brahman cannot be defined by words. The Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and all the six philosophies—everything has been defiled by being uttered by the mouth. Only one thing has not been defiled. It is Brahman. No one has as yet been able to say what Brahman is."

Vidyasagar (to his friends): "Well, this is a remarkable statement. Today I have learnt something quite new."

Sri Ramakrishna: "People think they have known all about Brahman. An ant went to a sugar-hill. It ate one grain and was satisfied. It took another grain in its mouth and went home. As it went, it thought that next time it would take the whole hill away! Men, who are but insignificant creatures, think like this. They do not know that Brahman is beyond mind and speech. However great a man may be, he can never know God. Shukadeva and others are at best only big ants that are able to take eight or ten grains in their mouths. That's all."

After remarking that the scriptures only throw out hints about Brahman, he said, "When one has Samadhi one attains the knowledge of Brahman—one realises it. In that state reason is perfectly at rest. The man becomes silent. He has not the power to express Brahman in words. A salt doll went to fathom the sea! (Laughter). It would report about its depth! But that was hopeless. As soon as it touched the water, it dissolved. And who was there to report?"

Someone asked: "Doesn't a man of realisation speak again after Samadhi?"

Sri Ramakrishna (to Vidyasagar and others): "Shankaracharya retained his purified ego in order to teach mankind. When one realises Brahman, one is silent. Reasoning lasts only up to realisation. So long as the butter has not reached the boiling point, it simmers. Reaching the boiling point, it simmers no more. But when a kneaded flour-cake is put into it, it again makes a noise; and when the cake is fried, it is again silent. Similarly the man of realisation comes down to a lower plane and talks in order to teach mankind.

"So long as the bee does not sit on the flower, it buzzes. When it has begun to sip the honey, it is quiet. Sometimes, however, after drinking its fill, it hums out of sheer joy.

"When a pitcher is dipped into a pond, it makes a gurgling noise. When full, it makes no more sound. (Laughter). But if the water is poured into another pitcher, again there is sound."

Then he explained how the man of realisation sees the whole universe as composed of Brahman and nothing else, and added that all paths are true.

In the course of the conversation the Master said that the Lord has endowed different beings with different degrees of power. Vidyasagar wanted to understand this better.

Sri Ramakrishna: "As the Omnipresent Entity He is in all beings, down to the ant. But there is a difference in the manifestation of power. How else can one man defeat ten while another flies from a single opponent? If it were not so, why do people respect you? Have you a pair of horns on your head? You have compassion, you have scholarship, which others have not. Therefore people respect you and come to see you. You admit this?"

Vidyasagar only smiled in reply.

Sri Ramakrishna: "There is nothing in mere scholarship. One reads books to ascertain the means of attaining God. What does the Gita mean? What you get by repeating the word ten times? If you repeat it, it becomes *gi-ta-gi-ta-gi-* etc.—that is, Tyâgi, or a man of renunciation. The Gita teaches man to give up everything and to try to realise God. Monk or householder, everyone must give up from the mind all attachment.

"Why does a man of realisation concern himself with devotion? The answer is that the ego cannot be rooted out. It disappears when he is in Samadhi, but when he returns to normal consciousness, it reappears. You see a tiger in a dream; when you awake, your heart still palpitates! The whole trouble is due to the ego. A bullock cries 'Hâm-mâ' or 'I'. That's why he suffers so. He is yoked to the plough, and is made to work in the sun and the rain. Then, perhaps, he is killed by a butcher, and out of his skin shoes are made, as well as drums, which are mercilessly beaten. Yet there is no end to his troubles, for, out of his entrails strings are made for bows for carding cotton. At last he no longer says 'Ham-ma' (I), but 'Tu-hun,' 'Tu-hun' (It is Thou), and is free. 'O Lord, I am the servant, and Thou art the Master; I am the son, and Thou art the Mother.'

"Rama said to Hanuman, 'In what light do you see me?' Hanuman replied, 'Rama, when I have the sense of ego left in me, I see that Thou art the Whole, and I am the part; Thou art the Master, and I am the servant; but when I attain the highest knowledge, I see that Thou art myself, and I am Thou.'

"God smiles twice. Once when the physician assures the dying patient's mother that he will cure her son. God smiles to think that the doctor says he will save him when He is going to kill him! The physician thinks that he is the doer—he has forgotten God. Again God smiles when two brothers divide land by throwing a rope across. He knows the whole universe belongs to Him, and yet these people are dividing the land between themselves!

"One cannot know Him through reason. Call on Him in the attitude of a servant, surrendering your all to him.

(To Vidyasagar) "Well, what is your attitude towards Him?"

Vidyasagar smiled and said, "I shall tell you some day privately." (Laughter).

Sri Ramakrishna said smiling, "One cannot know Him through scholarship and reasoning." He then burst into a song full of enthusiasm, "Who knows how the Mother is!" After the song he said to Vidyasagar, "Did you notice? 'The whole universe lies in the womb of the Mother.' And 'Even the six systems of philosophy cannot reach Her.' You must have faith and devotion."

He eulogised faith and said, "They say, Hanuman had so much faith in Rama's name that he could cross the ocean at a bound. But Rama himself had to build a bridge!" Then he sang two fiery songs describing the efficacy of faith and devotion, in the course of which he fell into Samadhi. The Pundit and everyone witnessed this scene in silent wonder. Regaining his normal state the Master again said, "It is He who is being addressed as Mother! The mother is our most intimate relation. One realises God through love alone. Intense devotion, love, and faith are necessary."

He sang another song. Then he said, "Rituals such as worship and sacrifice are not needed if one has love for Him. One needs a fan so long as the wind does not blow. But one may put it aside when there is a southern breeze, for it is superfluous.

"What you are engaged in is good work. If done without an eye to results, it will conduce to devotion and love for God. By working in this way one realises God.

"But the more devotion and love you have for Him, the more will your work decrease. The kind of work you are doing is for your own good. If you can do it without motive, your mind will be purified, you will attain love for God. And as soon as you have that, you will be able to realise Him. Man never helps the world. It is the Lord who does it. The man who works unselfishly will achieve his own well-being.

"There is gold within you, about which you as yet know nothing. It is just under the surface. If you once get a glimpse of it, work other than reflection on the Self will automatically decrease.

"Go on! A wood-cutter went to a forest in search of wood. A Sadhu told him to go on. He did so and found sandalwood trees. Some days passed, and he thought to himself, 'The Sadhu told me to go on, and not to stop with the sandalwood trees.' He went farther and came across a silver mine. After some days he went still farther—and found a gold mine. Farther on, he found diamonds and jewels! He became fabulously rich.

"By doing unselfish work one gains love for God; and gradually through His grace one attains Him. One sees God, and talks with Him, just as I am talking with you!"

The audience was spellbound. It was about 9 o'clock, and Sri Ramakrishna wanted to take leave. He addressed Vidyasagar with a smile, "Well, you evidently know all this that I have said. Only you don't recollect it all at this moment. (Laughter). In the treasure-house of King Varuna are untold riches—diamonds and jewels—but he hardly knows them."

Vidyasagar (smiling): "You may say so."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, many a rich man does not know his servant's names. (Laughter). Or even the whereabouts of precious things in his possession."

Everyone was charmed with the conversation. Sri Ramakrishna said to Vidyasagar, "Please come once to see Rani Rasmani's garden. It is a delightful place."

Vidyasagar: "Certainly, sir. You have been so kind in coming here, and it is my duty to return the visit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Visiting me! Please don't mention it."

Vidyasagar: "Why do you speak like that, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "We are but fishing craft. (Laughter). We can sail in all waters—small streams as well as large rivers. But you are a ship, and maybe you will run aground if you venture out!" (Laughter).

Vidyasagar only smiled. Sri Ramakrishna also was smiling. Then he said, "But even a ship may go now."

Vidyasagar: "Yes, it is the rainy season." (Laughter).

The Master stood up. Vidyasagar rose to see him off. Sri Ramakrishna silently repeated the Lord's name on his fingers in an ecstatic mood, probably for the sake of the Pundit, and stepped into his carriage. Vidyasagar offered to pay the carriage-hire, which was thankfully declined. The party then left for Dakshineswar.

We have already seen that Keshab Chandra Sen thought it a great privilege to spend a few hours in the saintly company of Sri Ramakrishna. He often arranged for occasional steamer-trips. We shall describe one such trip. In the afternoon of October 27, 1882, Keshab was on a Ganges steamer, with some of his followers. The steamer halted in front of the Dakshineswar temple and Keshab sent some of his disciples in a boat to fetch Sri Ramakrishna. The Master, with Vijay, who chanced to visit him that day, stepped into the boat. But he soon lost all sense-consciousness and was taken to the steamer with some difficulty. Keshab and others bowed to him. Being immersed in Samadhi he did not perceive it. He was conducted to a cabin and put in one of the chairs. Keshab and Vijay sat down also, while other devotees, mostly Brahmos, sat on the floor. All earnestly gazed at the Master, who was gradually coming down from his Samadhi. He was heard to talk to himself, "Mother, why hast Thou brought me here? Shall I be able to get them out of their enclosures?" Someone among the audience referred to Pavhâri Bâbâ, the saint of Ghâzipur, and said that he kept in his room a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master, still unable to speak, simply smiled and pointing to his body said, "Only the outer covering!" Shortly after he said, "But there is one thing to be borne in mind. The heart of the devotee is the temple of the Lord. He is more or less manifest in all things, but specially so in the devotee's heart. A zemindar can be anywhere within his estate, but people say that he lives most in such and such a parlour. The heart of the devotee is the Lord's parlour.

"He whom the Jnanis call Brahman is addressed by the Yogis as Atman and by the devotees as Bhagavân. The same Brahmin is a priest when he worships and a cook when he works in the kitchen."

He then explained that Brahman and Shakti were one and the same thing viewed from different standpoints:

"As Jal, water, and Pâni. A tank has several ghats. In one of these the Hindus take water and call it Jal; in another the Mohammedans drink water, and they call it Pani; while a third is used by Englishmen who call the same thing water. All three are the same, the difference being only in name. Some call Him Allah, some God, and others designate Him as Brahman, Kali, Rama, Hari, Jesus or Durga."

He then sang some impressive songs to the Mother. A devotee asked if one must renounce the world to attain God. Sri Ramakrishna replied that everybody need not give up the world. Let a householder fix his mind upon God. Let him do his work with one hand and touch the feet of the Lord with the other. After finishing his work, let him cling to His feet with both hands. The Master continued: "It all depends on the mind. Bondage and freedom are both in the mind. The mind will take on any hue you choose to put on it. It is like a cloth in a dyer's house—you may have it dyed red, or blue, or green, or in any other colour. One caresses his wife in one way and his child in another way. But it is with the same mind.

"I am a free soul; there is no bondage for me either in the world or in the forest. I am the child of God—son of the King of kings. Who is there to bind me in fetters? In case you are bitten by a snake, the venom loses its power if you resolutely repeat, 'There is no venom.' Similarly, if you say with a will, 'I am not bound, I am free,' free you shall be. Why talk of sin and hell-fire all your life? Say once, 'I shall do no more wicked deeds,' and have faith in His holy name."

He sang feelingly a song depicting Radha's yearning for Krishna, at the end of which he said, "Whether you believe in Krishna and Radha or not, try to imitate their intense longing."

After the conversation, all partook of light refreshments. The Master noticed that Keshab and Vijay, owing to their differences of opinion, were not quite at ease. He sought to reconcile them and said to Keshab, "Well, here is Vijay. Your differences are like those of Shiva and Rama. Shiva was Rama's spiritual guide. They fought but were soon reconciled and became fast friends again. But the fight between Shiva's ghosts and Rama's monkeys went on! (Laughter). Such differences of opinion are quite common among friends. Mother and daughter often have their separate observances. The Lord Himself wills such complications so that His play may last the longer. (Laughter). Râmânuja was a Vishishtâdvaitin, while his teacher was an Advaitin. They came to differ, and each tried to oust the other. It is but natural. A friend is a friend for all that."

The steamer touched at Calcutta. The Master with some others went in a carriage to Surendra's house and thence returned to Dakshineswar.

It was on the 28th of November, 1883, that Sri Ramakrishna saw Keshab for the last time at the Lily Cottage, where he was lying seriously ill. At 5 P.M. he came with Latu, Rakhal, and a few other devotees. He heard some one say that Keshab talked with the Divine Mother and laughed and wept. The passing reference at once threw him into a deep Samadhi. When it became less intense, he began to speak, almost to himself, "There is the body, and there is the Soul. The body has had a birth and will pass away; but the Soul is immortal. Take the case of a betel-nut; when ripe, it is detached from the rind; but it is very hard to separate the two when the nut is green. One gets rid of the body-idea when one sees Him—realises Him. Then one feels the body as distinct from the Soul."

At this moment Keshab entered the room. He was lean and thin, and advanced with great difficulty. He saluted the Master and sat on the floor with him. The Master was still in a state of divine intoxication. He began to talk of the highest knowledge which obliterates all difference, and described the identity of Brahman and Shakti. Then he said, "After realisation one sees Him everywhere. He is most conspicuous in man, and among men, in pure souls—who have not the least hankering for lust and wealth."

Continuing he said, "Material prosperity has no hold on God. What does He like? Not wealth, but divine emotion, love, devotion, discrimination, renunciation, and so forth. People look upon God from their own standpoint.

(To Keshab, smiling): "There is a meaning to your illness. Many waves of divine emotion have passed through your body. One does not feel them at the time, but they react on the body later on. I have noticed the steamers passing along the Ganges, scarcely producing any perceptible change. But a short while after, the water dashes against the banks and makes a huge commotion. Sometimes it even washes away a portion of the bank!

"If an elephant enters a hut, it breaks everything to pieces. Similar is the effect of divine emotions on the system.

"You think everything is finished, but so long as there is the least trace of malady left, He won't let you go. If you get your admission into a hospital, you cannot come away at pleasure. So long as there is even a slight residuum of the disease, the house-surgeon won't discharge you. You should have thought before getting the admission!"

Keshab highly appreciated the simile and laughed and laughed. Sri Ramakrishna continued, "Everything depends on His will. 'Thou dost Thy work, Mother, but people think they do it.'

"The gardener exposes the roots of Basra rose plants in order that they may have the advantage of the dew and flourish. The same is, perhaps, the case with you. (Laughter). Next time there will probably be a great upheaval.

"I feel most anxious whenever you fall ill. During your last illness, I used to weep towards the end of the night, and say to Mother, 'Whom shall I talk to, Mother, if something particularly evil befalls Keshab?' When I came to Calcutta I offered worship to Mother Kali, and prayed to Her that you might be cured."

Keshab's mother saluted the Master from a distance and desired his blessings for Keshab's recovery. Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Pray to the Blissful Mother, and She will remove all troubles." Then he said to Keshab gravely, "Don't be too much among the ladies. It will make your condition worse. You will be better if you hear only spiritual talk."

A few weeks later Keshab passed away. The event was a great shock to Sri Ramakrishna, who wept bitterly for his loss and could not leave his bed for three days. He afterwards said, "I felt as if one of my limbs were paralysed." From this the reader will get a glimpse of the great love he bore to Keshab.

From Keshab's house Sri Ramakrishna went to the house of another Brahmo devotee, named Jaygopâl Sen. There was much instructive talk. In answer to a query the Master said: "The only way out is to retire into solitude now and then and pray to God, and try to realise Him."

Question: "Shall we give up home?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Not altogether. Whenever you get the leisure, spend a day or two in some solitary place, free from all contact with the world. Then you must not talk on secular matters with any worldly-minded man. Either you must retire to solitude or associate with holy men."

Question: "How should we know a holy man?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "He is a holy man whose mind and soul have been given up to God. He must be a man who has renounced lust and wealth. A Sadhu never looks at a woman with a worldly eye. He always keeps away from her; and if ever he approaches her, he regards her as his mother and worships her.

A Sadhu constantly thinks of God, talks of God and nothing else, and he serves all creatures, knowing the presence of God in them. These are some of the characteristics of a Sadhu."

Question: "Why is the world called Maya?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "So long as one does not realise God, one has to eliminate finite things by a process of discrimination. Those who have realised Him know that He has become the all. God is Maya and Jiva and the universe. He includes the universe and all beings. If you separate from a Bael its shell, pulp, and seeds and somebody asks you to see how much the fruit weighs, will you leave the shell and seeds out and weigh the pulp alone? Of course you will include them. Then only you will be able to say the Bael weighs so much. The shell represents the universe and the seeds the beings in it. At the time of discrimination you call the Jivas and the universe non-Self—unreal. Only the pulp then appears as real, and the shell and the seeds as unreal. But with discrimination, all the different elements are perceived as forming one whole. One sees that the same substance that has formed the pulp has also made the shell and the seeds. By the word Bael you mean the whole fruit."

The Master returned to Dakshineswar at night.

PRANKRISHNA, ADHAR, TARAK OF BELGHARIA, AND VAIKUNTHA

Prânkrishna Mukherji came of a distinguished family in the Twenty-four Parganas and lived in Calcutta. He was in charge of Messrs Mackenzie Lyall's Exchange. Though a householder, he took a great interest in Vedanta and was a sincere devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, whom he visited as often as he could. Sri Ramakrishna loved him greatly and once (April, 1882) went to his house with his devotees and celebrated a festival there. Owing to his corpulence the Master would sometimes refer to him as the "fat Brahmin."

On January 1st, 1883, Prankrishna came to Dakshineswar and took his seat near the Master on the floor. Rakhal, Narendra, and Mahendra were also present. There was a small basket of sweets at hand, from which Sri Ramakrishna took a little and remarked smiling to Prankrishna, "You see, as I take the name of the Mother, I am getting all these things to eat! But She does not give paltry things, She gives immortal assets—knowledge, love, discrimination, renunciation."

Just then a child of six or seven entered the room. The Master was seized with a novel feeling. Like a boy he tried to conceal the basket of sweets and finally moved it to one side. In the act of protecting the sweets, he fell into Samadhi! After a long pause he heaved a sigh and began to talk to Prankrishna: "God is not only formless, but also with form. One can see His matchless form through devotion and rapture. Mother reveals Herself variously."

Then referring to the command he had received from the Mother to remain in a devotional attitude instead of unity with the Impersonal, he said, "At times I forget this and suffer in consequence. Disregarding this injunction, I once had my teeth broken. So unless I hear the voice from heaven or have some other realisation, I will remain in a devotional attitude. What do you say to this?"

Prankrishna: "Right, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna: "And why should I refer to you either? Within this form (meaning himself) there is someone who is manipulating me in this way. Sometimes I used to have divine consciousness induced in me, and I could not rest until I worshipped myself. I am the instrument, and He is the operator. Formerly I used to see divine forms with the naked eye—as I am seeing you. Now I see them in a state of trance."

The Master sat on his bedstead, filled with divine emotion, watching Rakhal. His hair stood on end, and he fell into Samadhi.

A little while after, he came back to his normal state, and in the course of conversation said to Prankrishna and Mahendra, "Many people talk glibly about the highest knowledge, but in their everyday lives they are satisfied with the things of the lower plane.

"The nearer you come to God, the more peace you will have. Peace—peace—ineffable peace! The nearer you are to the Ganges, the more you feel its coolness, and after a bath you are still more refreshed.

"You can't realise Him if you have the least bit of attachment in you. A thread with ever so few ragged fibres won't pass through the eye of a needle."

Another day (5th April, 1884) in the course of conversation the Master spoke of his own condition: "Now I find a change is coming over me. Long ago Vaishnav Charan told me that when I would see God in man, I would have perfection in knowledge. Now I see it is He who moves in so many forms—sometimes as a pious man, sometimes as a hypocrite, and again as a wicked man. Hence I say, 'Narayana in the pious man, Narayana in the hypocrite, Narayana in the wicked and lustful'."

It was in the April of 1883 that Adhar Chandra Sen first came to see the Master at Dakshineswar. He was a Deputy Magistrate. A friend of his had just lost his eldest son. Adhar, who had heard of the Master and long wished to see him, brought his friend to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was in Samadhi when they entered the room. When he came back to the normal state, he began to talk to Adhar. The latter told of his friend's bereavement. Sri Ramakrishna sang a song about the transitoriness of life and the necessity for devotion in facing death. He then consoled the bereaved father and instructed him to surrender himself to God.

The Master called Adhar aside and said, "You are a Deputy Magistrate, but that, too, is due to the grace of God. Don't forget Him. And know one thing for certain, that everyone must pay the debt of nature. Our sojourn here is temporary. This world is the centre for our activities. We come here to work out certain things, just as people come to work in Calcutta but have their homes elsewhere.

"You must do some work as discipline, but finish it quickly. A goldsmith in smelting gold uses his bellows, his fan, and his blowing tube to kindle the fire to the right point, so that the gold may melt easily.

It is not until after it is put into the mould that he stops and orders tobacco. There must be stern determination. Then only one can practise successfully. The name of God has tremendous power; it destroys ignorance.

"Always direct your mind towards God. At first you have to struggle a little; then you will enjoy your pension."

At the very first meeting Adhar was attracted to the Master. His visits to Dakshineswar became more and more frequent. In fact, he came almost every day after business hours. The Master used to visit him now and then in Calcutta, making of these visits little festivals. The Mother had shown him in a trance that Adhar's house was one of his own resorts.

One day Adhar was gloomy because Sri Ramakrishna had not visited him for a long time. He fervently prayed in his heart that he might soon grace his home with his presence. The same evening the Master appeared at his house with Ramlal, M., and one or two other devotees. He passed some time listening to Ramlal's devotional songs. After partaking of light refreshments he went on to Jadu Mallik's house.

Once Adhar failed to go to Dakshineswar for a few days. When he next made his appearance, the Master asked the cause of his absence. Adhar replied that he had to attend several meetings relating to a school and other concerns. "So you forgot us altogether in attending to these things," said Sri Ramakrishna. After a brief pause he suddenly said, "Look here, these are all unreal. Your school, your meeting, and your office are transitory things. God alone is real and everything else is unreal. One should devote one's whole mind to calling upon Him." Adhar kept silent. Sri Ramakrishna continued, "All this is unreal. This body is subject to death, which may overtake it at any moment. One must pray to God before it is too late." Adhar was penitent. After a while he said in all humility, "Sir, it is long since you have been to our house. The parlour has a musty smell about it—everything in it seems to have lost its savour." These words touched the Master deeply. He stood up suddenly and blessed Adhar and M., who was also present, touching their head and chest. Then he said with infinite tenderness in the voice, "I see you as the Lord Himself. You are my own people."

Shortly after Adhar applied for the Vice-Chairmanship of the Calcutta Municipality. He sought the help of many prominent men of Calcutta in this matter. At his request Sri Ramakrishna himself prayed to Kali, "Mother, he is Thy devotee. Let him have the post if Thou so likest." But he added in the same breath, "Isn't he foolish? Instead of praying to Thee for knowledge and devotion he runs after trifles." Adhar failed to secure the post. On his next visit to Dakshineswar the Master said to him, "Why did you go a-begging of those worldly people, after your long aquaintance with us?" Adhar replied, "One living in the world cannot but do these things. And you did not dissuade me." Sri Ramakrishna then said, "Well, it is better to check the desire for enjoyment than to inflame it. After I had got into this state, they asked me to sign and receive my pay from the cashier of the Kali temple, as everybody else did. But I said, 'That is impossible. If you like, you may give it to somebody else. I do not ask for it.' I am the servant of the one Lord; whom else shall I serve? 'Serve one master. People hanker after a situation of fifty or a hundred rupees, and you are drawing three hundred. Yours is not an ordinary post. Why not stick to it? Isn't it an annoyance to have several masters?" He went on in this strain for some time and concluded by saying that God alone is real and everything else is unreal.

The Master's frequent references to death and the transitoriness of life had a deep meaning behind them which passed unnoticed at the time. Shortly after, Adhar died as the result of a riding accident. Sri Ramakrishna had warned him about riding, but Adhar did not take these warnings seriously. His death caused great pain to the Master, who wept for him bitterly before the Divine Mother.

A young man named Târak Nâth Mukherji, from Belghariâ, often visited the Master. Though married and living as a householder, he was a noble soul and endowed with many spiritual qualities. He lived temporarily in Calcutta, whence he used to come to Dakshineswar in spite of the opposition of his family. Sri Ramakrishna loved him and assigned him to a very high place among his devotees.

One day the Master said to him, "Always be on your guard against lust and wealth. Once entangled in the meshes of lust, there is no way out for you. It is a dreadful slough. One who has fallen into it cannot get out. Come here now and then."

Tarak: "My people at home won't allow me to come."

A devotee: "If someone's mother forbids him to come to Dakshineswar and threatens to curse him if he disobeys, what is he to do?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "A mother who does this is a veritable evil genius. No blame attaches to one for disobeying such a one, for she stands in the way of God-realisation. One may disobey one's superiors for the sake of God. Bharata did not listen to his mother Kaikeyi in his devotion for Rama. The Gopis went counter to their husbands in order to meet Sri Krishna. Prahlâda disobeyed his father for the sake of God. Bâli disregarded his Guru, Shukrâchârya, to please the Lord. Vibhishana set aside the words of his elder brother, Râvana, in order to realise Rama. Excepting this command to turn away from God, you must obey her in all things."

Then the Master felt the weight of Tarak's hand and said, "There is still a bit of crookedness left, but it will disappear. Pray a little to God; and come here now and then."

One day Sri Ramakrishna while in Samadhi placed his foot on the chest of Tarak—a mark of special grace. The intrinsic greatness of the boy will be apparent from the Master's following remark: "As Tarak was returning home from Dakshineswar, I noticed that something came out of this body (meaning himself) like a flame of light and followed the boy."

Vaikuntha Nath Sanyal had religious tendencies in his boyhood, but later on he became sceptical. He was fortunate, however, in meeting a real teacher of the Vedanta and was referred by him to Sri Ramakrishna.

At first he hesitated about going to Dakshineswar, but finally went with a devotee of the Master. He was profoundly impressed. In the Master's presence he felt a peace and blessedness which he had never known before in his life. The oftener he went to Dakshineswar, the more he came under the divine spell of Sri Ramakrishna.

One day, pointing to a picture of Sri Gauranga's Sankirtana party that hung in his room, Sri Ramakrishna said to Vaikuntha, "See, how these people are surcharged with divine emotion!"

Vaikuntha: "But, sir, they are all vulgar people."

Sri Ramakrishna: "What do you mean? You must never say that again."

Vaikuntha: "Why, sir, I am a man of Nadia, and I know that the Vaishnavas are generally recruited from the lower classes."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You hail from Nadia! Then I bow to you a second time.[1] Well, Ram and others call this (meaning himself) an Incarnation of God. What do you think?"

Vaikuntha: "That is no great compliment, I should say."

Sri Ramakrishna: "You surprise me. Why do you think it is not a great compliment?"

Vaikuntha: "Because, sir, an Incarnation is a more or less partial manifestation of God, and I look upon you as the great Shiva Himself."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well?"

Vaikuntha: "Yes, I think so. I cannot help it. You asked me to meditate on Shiva; but in spite of repeated attempts I cannot do so. Whenever I sit down to meditate, your smiling face comes before me, and I cannot replace it—nor do I feel inclined to do so—with that of Shiva. Therefore I think of you as Shiva."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "You astonish me. But I know that I am not equal even to a tiny hair of your body. Well, I have been very anxious about you: but today I am satisfied."

It was the boy's acceptance of him as the highest spiritual ideal that set the Master at rest. This was a common way with him of ascertaining a disciple's religious outlook.

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[1] It was the Master's habit to salute a man at the very first sight.

NAG MAHASHAY AND SURESH CH. DATTA

Foremost among the householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna was Durgâ Charan Nâg, better known as Nag Mahâshay. Born in 1846 of poor parents, Durga Charan lost his mother at an early age and was brought up by his father and aunt. From his boyhood he had a passion for truth and was much liked by his companions because of his amiable disposition. The poverty of the family gave him little opportunity for a liberal education, yet he managed to attend daily a high school at Dacca, ten miles from his home. Later he studied homoeopathy. But he charged no fixed fees. Whatever was given him, he accepted, if he considered that it was not too much. Often he gave money to his patients, or made loans to them which were never repaid. Sometimes he did not keep enough for his own needs. His sympathy for the poor and destitute knew no bounds, and he would cheerfully sacrifice everything he had to be of service to them. Even animals partook of his love. He purchased whole baskets of live fish to free them in the nearest tank. The cobra had no fears for him. He boldly said, "It is not the snake of the jungle that kills, but the snake of evil desire!"

He was married at an early age, but he had an instinctive horror of marital relations. On the death of his first wife, his father forced him to marry a second time; but sex attraction had not the slightest influence over his immaculate mind. He was too fully convinced of the evanescence of the world to be lured into its meshes. He feared that, being a married man with the necessity of earning money, he would be bound to the world. His one absorbing thought was how to escape such bonds. He was told that without realisation of God there was no salvation—but how to realise Him? He spent night after night in prayer and meditation, but with no success. Hearing one day from a monk about the need of a Guru in the religious life, he sat daily on the bank of the Ganges, praying to the Divine Mother to send him one. He eagerly watched the holy men who came to bathe in the river, hoping that someone among them might initiate him. One morning he saw a boat approaching, and in it was the spiritual teacher of his family. In response to his inquiries as to why he was in Calcutta, the Guru replied, "I have come at the special command of the Mother to initiate you." The initiation quickened Nag Mahashay's aspirations for a religious life. By day he ministered to the sick; but his nights were spent on the banks of the Ganges in prayer or meditation. Often he would lose outward consciousness. Though his father was much troubled about him, his sympathies were more with his young daughter-in-law. The girl, however, was not disturbed; she knew that her husband was above all earthly attachment. Nag Mahashay said to her, "Love on the physical plane never lasts. He indeed is blessed who can give his love to God with his whole heart. Even a little attachment to the body endures for several births. So be not attached to this cage of bone and flesh. Take shelter at the feet of the Mother and think of Her alone. Thus will your life here and hereafter be ennobled."

Suresh Chandra Datta was a great friend of Nag Mahashay. They often passed long hours in discussing religious topics. But mere words failed to satisfy Nag Mahashay. In bitter anguish he said to Suresh one day, "Time is wasted in mere talk; unless something is directly perceived, life is useless."

Not long after this, he came under the holy influence of Sri Ramakrishna. His friend Suresh had heard of the sage from Keshab Chandra Sen, but said nothing of it for two months; when at last he did so, Nag Mahashay was seized with an irresistible desire to go to see the saint at once. The following day, the friends arrived at the door of Sri Ramakrishna. A man seated before it said in response to their inquiries as to where the Paramahamsa lived, "Here, but today he has gone to Chandernagore. Come some other day." Weary and down-hearted, they were turning away, when they saw someone inside beckoning to them to enter. It was Sri Ramakrishna. He received them graciously and explained that Hazra told that story to keep strangers out. He then asked them to sit closer. Nag Mahashay tried to touch the Master's feet, but he drew them back. Nag Mahashay interpreted this to mean that he was not yet fit to touch them. He gazed intently at Sri Ramakrishna, who asked him, "What are you looking at?" "I had a great desire to see you, and now I am gratifying it," was the reply. The Master told both to go to the Panchavati and meditate. Afterwards he took them to see the temples. At about five o'clock they took their leave of the Master who said to them as they left, "Good-bye; come again. That is the only way for us to become acquainted." Until his next visit the following week Nag Mahashay was filled with a burning desire to see the Master again. When he arrived at Dakshineswar, he entered the room with such eagerness that the Master said, "You have done well to come. I was waiting for you." A little later he added, "Don't fear, my child, you have attained a very exalted state." He then asked him to prepare tobacco, and when he had left the room to do so, the Master remarked to Suresh, "Did you notice? This man is like a blazing fire!"

The next time Nag Mahashay went to Dakshineswar, he found Sri Ramakrishna alone. At the sight of him, the Master stood up in an ecstatic mood and muttering something to himself began to pace the room. Nag Mahashay was frightened. Then the Master said in his natural tone, "You are a doctor, will you see what ails my foot?" Nag Mahashay gently felt the foot, but could find nothing wrong with it. "Why don't you look more carefully," said the Master again. Then Nag Mahashay understood that his desire to touch the holy feet had been noted and that he was being given the opportunity to fulfil it. With tears of joy in his eyes he began to stroke them and touched them with his head. He used to say later on, "One did not have to ask him for anything. He understood at once one's innermost desires and fulfilled them of his own accord." Thenceforth Nag Mahashay regarded Sri Ramakrishna as his Chosen Ideal. He would say, "He himself most graciously made me know who he was. None can know or understand him without his grace." One day the Master suddenly asked him pointing to his own body, "What do you think of this?" Nag Mahashay replied with folded hands, "You cannot hoodwink me any more, divine Master. Through your grace I have come to know that you are He." Sri Ramakrishna fell into Samadhi and placed his right foot on the chest of Nag Mahashay. The latter had a vision in which he saw the whole universe floating in a limitless ocean of divine Bliss.

Nag Mahashay became a frequent visitor to Dakshineswar and became one of the favoured disciples. But so modest was he that at first he would absent himself on Sundays or holidays, considering himself too insignificant to mingle with the great men who visited the Master on these special days. Yet later on, when they came to know him, they paid him the highest honours. He accepted without question every word that fell from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna. He would say, "Even when Sri Ramakrishna said anything in joke, it had a deep significance." One day he overheard the Master saying, "It is difficult for doctors, lawyers, and brokers to advance on the path of God." Referring to doctors in particular he said, "If the mind clings to the tiny drops of medicines, how can it conceive of the Infinite?" Nag Mahashay had been feeling that the demands of his profession were interfering with his spiritual life, but to please his father he continued to practise. These words of the Master made him decide to give up the profession. That very evening he threw his medicine-chest and medical books into the Ganges. Thenceforth he gave his entire attention to prayer and meditation. Gradually he became possessed of a strong desire to renounce the world. One day he went to Dakshineswar and begged the Master's permission to embrace the life of Sannyasa. But Sri Ramakrishna's reply was, "What harm is there in remaining as a householder? Only keep the mind fixed on God. Live as king Janaka did. Your life will be an example of how a householder should live." There was no help for it—Nag Mahashay had to continue the householder's life. He used to say, "None had the power to disregard the Master's words. He would indicate definitely the respective duties of all his devotees."

Though Nag Mahashay remained in the world, he spent most of his time in prayer and meditation. It became almost impossible for him to turn his attention to any other occupation. On his father's retirement Nag Mahashay was appointed to his place. But it was idle to expect routine work from a man who had reached the point where even food and clothing had become unimportant. One of his friends who worked in the same firm, helped him out now and then by taking over some of his duties. Noticing his stern spirit of renunciation, Sri Ramakrishna said to him another day, "Don't leave your home. You shall be provided with plain food and clothing anyhow."

Nag Mahashay: "How is it possible to live in the world? The sight of the misery of others is unbearable"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Believe me, no blame shall attach to you in the world. People will wonder at your life."

Nag Mahashay: "How should I spend my days?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You need do nothing but associate with holy men."

Nag Mahashay: "I am a fool, as you know. How shall I recognise them?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You needn't stir out in search of them. Stay at home, and real Sadhus will come to you to pay their respects."

But no Sannyasin could lead a more austere life than he. He covered his body with a coarse cotton cloth and walked barefooted in all seasons. He took only the poorest food, without seasoning of any kind. Often he fasted for days at a time, and would say to friends who remonstrated, "If I am to think day and night of food only, when shall I think of God? Constant thought about food becomes an obsession." Even sacramental delicacies he took rarely. He used to say, "They will create a hankering for palatable things." He stifled for ever all egoistic feelings and was humility itself, considering himself the servant of everyone, however lowly. Referring to his unimpeachable purity, his wife used to say, "Taking the name of Sri Ramakrishna he trampled under foot all animal propensities. He lived in the midst of fire, but was never burned."

Suresh Chandra Datta, Nag Mahashay's friend, was born in an aristocratic family of Calcutta. He was originally a Brahmo and a follower of Keshab Chandra Sen, from whom, as already said, he heard about Sri Ramakrishna. A staunch believer in the impersonal aspect of God, he had never bowed his head before any of the Hindu deities, differing in this from his friend, Durga Charan, who was an orthodox Hindu obeying every scriptural injunction.

After his first visit to the Master, Suresh went to see him frequently. Then he was ordered to Quetta on duty. Nag Mahashay urged him to take his initiation from the Master before his departure. Having no faith in this ceremony, he at first refused to comply. Later he agreed to have it if the Master told him to do so. Next day the two friends went to Dakshineswar, and Nag Mahashay raised the question of initiation. Sri Ramakrishna said to Suresh, "Yes, Durga Charan is right. A man should practise religious exercises under the direction of a Guru. What prevents you from admitting this?" "Sir, I have no faith in Mantras," replied Suresh. "All right," said the Master, "don't worry about it now. Everything will come in time." Suresh left for Quetta. Some time after, he felt a great hankering for initiation and came back to Calcutta to ask Sri Ramakrishna to become his spiritual guide. But it was too late; and he had no further opportunity of approaching the Master with his request.[1]

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[1] It is said that his cherished desire was strangely fulfilled after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away.

GIRISH CHANDRA GHOSH

The name of Girish Chandra Ghosh is a household word in Bengal as the greatest dramatist in the Bengali language and the father of the Bengali stage. He was a very dissipated man, due in part to the social conditions of his time. He was one of the first of the cultured people in Bengal to feel the impact of Western education with its strong materialistic bias. Everything that was Western was accepted without question simply because it was Western and new. Unfortunately it was easier for some to imitate the vices of the West such as drinking, than its virtues. There were others who lost all reverence for the old Hinduism and became Christians or Brahmos. The situation among the orthodox Hindus was no better, because of their differences of opinion. The priests, the custodians of the ancient spiritual culture, had become degenerated and hypocritical. These conflicting conditions produced great confusion in Girish's mind. His faith in the old was gone; and being dissatisfied with the new, he plunged himself into all sorts of dissipations in order to stifle the question that was always in his mind, "Does God exist; and if He does, how can I attain Him?" "The necessities for the physical life are present in abundance everywhere," he would say to himself, "why then must one labour to acquire the necessities for the spiritual life? Why shouldn't they too be right at hand? The whole thing is a fraud. The materialists are wiser. Their view is right, because at least they get some fun out of life." For fourteen years he tried to live up to this conclusion.

Then came a series of reverses which upset him. He was frantic in his efforts to find some way out of his difficulties. He bethought himself of taking refuge with the Lord Shiva of Târakeswar to whom the afflicted go for the cure of disease. "I also am hopelessly beset with dangers," he thought, "can He not help me? Let me try." He tried to surrender himself to the Lord. The attempt was successful. The dangers passed quickly. Girish was convinced that God was real. He was free from danger, but what about the other world? He was in grave doubt as to which path to follow. He said to himself, "I have experienced the glories of Târaknâth. Let me call on Him." Gradually his faith in the deities returned. "But people say," he again thought, "it is the Guru who shows the way. Well, can I not find the way through the Lord's name? But everyone says that the Guru is indispensable. Well, whom should I accept as such? And if, as it is said, the Guru should be regarded as God Himself, how can I think of a man like myself as God?" He again became restless. He could never bow to a human Guru. Then he said to himself, "Never mind. I won't look for a Guru. But I can pray to Taraknath that in case I need one, He may graciously act in that capacity for me. I shall take His name once every morning and wait for further developments."

One day Girish read in the *Indian Mirror* that a Paramahamsa lived at Dakshineswar and that Keshab Chandra Sen with his disciples paid frequent visits to him. Girish, seeing that the Brahmos had taken to saying "Hari" or "Mother", thought they might set up a Paramahamsa as well, far as he might be from the true Paramahamsas of ancient times. Shortly after, he heard that the Paramahamsa was visiting a neighbour.

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Out of curiosity he went to see him. It was evening, and the lamps were lit. But Sri Ramakrishna, who was then in a semi-conscious state, did not see the light. He inquired if it was evening. Girish thought this the height of absurdity, and left in disgust.

Some years after this, Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to the house of Balaram Bose. Girish was invited also. He found the room crowded. He was agreeably surprised at the conduct of Sri Ramakrishna. He was under the impression that Paramahamsas and Yogis never spoke, never bowed to any one, but if hard pressed, condescended to accept some little personal service. But this Paramahamsa behaved quite differently. Girish sat for a few minutes, when Babu Shishir Kumar Ghosh, editor of the *Amrita Bâzâr Patrikâ*, who also was present there but did not seem to have much respect for Sri Ramakrishna, said to Girish, "Well, let us go. We have had enough of this." Girish wanted to stay, but had to comply with his friend's request. This was his second visit.

Some days passed. Girish's *Chaitanya Lilâ* was being played at the Star Theatre (then on Beadon Street), and he was pacing the courtyard of the theatre, when a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna came to him and said, "Paramahamsa Deva has come to see the play. Will you kindly give him a seat, or shall we purchase a ticket?" "He will be admitted free," replied Girish, "but others will have to pay." He was about to advance and receive the Master, when he found that he was already within the compound. Sri Ramakrishna saluted Girish; Girish returned the salute, but the Master bowed again. This was repeated again. Girish stopped short lest the salutations go on for ever. He conducted the Master to a box, engaged a servant to fan him, and feeling indisposed, went home. This was his third meeting with the Master.

About this time he met a Vaishnava painter, who told him that every day he offered food to his Chosen Deity, who actually partook of it. But, he added, none could experience such divine favour without the grace of a Guru. The statement, whether true or false, profoundly impressed Girish. He shut himself in his room and wept bitterly.

Three days after the above incident, Girish saw Sri Ramakrishna accompanied by two or three devotees walking slowly past his house. As soon as he saw Girish, the Master saluted him. Girish returned the salute, and the Master went on his way. Girish felt himself so much drawn to him that he longed to run and overtake him. Just then came a message from the Master, asking Girish to come to see him. Girish followed the messenger to Balaram's house, arriving just after the Master. Girish asked him, "Who is a Guru?" "He is an intermediary," replied the Master, "he brings about the meeting of the devotee with God." Then he added, "You have your Guru." "What is a Mantra?" again asked Girish. "God's name," was the answer. He illustrated it by a reference to Kabir who wanted to make Râmânanda his Guru. But the monk, for some reason, refused to initiate him. Ramananda used to bathe very early in the Ganges. One day Kabir lay on the steps of the bathing ghat. In the dark Ramananda's feet touched the prostrate body of Kabir. The monk at once took the name Rama, for he looked upon every creature as the manifestation of the Lord. Kabir accepted that word as his Mantra and attained perfection by repeating it. The conversation drifted to theatres, and Sri Ramakrishna said, "Let me visit your theatre again."

Girish: "Very well; you may come any day."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But please accept some fee."

Girish: "All right, you may pay eight annas."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But that will not purchase a good seat."

Girish: "You may occupy a box, as on the previous occasion."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, you must take one rupee."

Girish agreed, and there the matter was settled. Balarama had some sweets served to the Master, who took a little, and the rest was distributed among the devotees. Girish wanted some, but dared not lest some one should criticise him. Shortly after he saluted the Master and left with a devotee. The latter asked Girish, "How did you find him?" "A great devotee," answered Girish. He was full of joy. There was no despondency now over not having a Guru. He said to himself, "It is fools who say that we must have a Guru. Hasn't the Paramahamsa just said that I have my Guru? I am not going to listen to anybody else."

It was arrogance that made Girish refuse to accept a Guru. He considered it bondage to owe allegiance to a mere man. But this haughtiness gave way before the magic influence of Sri Ramakrishna, for it was he who had done the bowing, not Girish. Before this utter absence of egoism the proud head of Girish bent of itself. Another day, some time after his last meeting with the Master, Girish was seated in the green-room of his theatre, when a devotee, Devendra Nath Mazumdar, came to him in haste and said that Sri Ramakrishna had come to see the play. "Very well," replied Girish, "please conduct him to a box." "But won't you come and receive him?" he asked. "Why," said Girish, "can't he get down from the coach without me?" But he went nevertheless, and found Sri Ramakrishna just about to alight. As he looked upon his serene countenance, Girish was smitten with remorse to think that he had not been more cordial in welcoming the saint. He took the Master upstairs, touched his feet without knowing why he did so, and presented him with a rose. The Master returned it saying, "Flowers are for gods or for fashionable folk; I am neither."

Girish conducted the Master and the devotees to a special room. Sri Ramakrishna sat on a chair and Girish on another. There were other chairs in the room, which Girish repeatedly asked the devotees to take, but they preferred to stand. Referring to this incident later Girish said, "I was too stupid to know that disciples should not sit on the same level with the Guru." The Master said to him, "There is crookedness in your mind."

Girish knew that he had many failings, but he did not know which one was meant. He asked, "How can I get rid of it?" "Have faith," was the reply.

Some days elapsed. One afternoon, at his theatre, Girish received a note saying that Sri Ramakrishna was to visit Ramchandra Datta that evening. Immediately he felt a great longing to see the Master, but hesitated because he had not been invited. The strange attraction, however, drew him on. He stopped several times on the way, but at length reached his destination.

It was evening. Sri Ramakrishna was dancing and singing with his devotees. Tears stood in Girish's eyes at the sight of such fervour and enthusiasm. In the course of the dance the Master plunged into Samadhi, and the devotees began to take the dust of his feet. Girish would have liked to have done this as well, but false pride checked him. He was not going to leave himself open to ridicule. Curiously enough, the moment such thoughts crossed his mind, the Master came out of his Samadhi, and dancing towards Girish, fell into Samadhi again before him.

After the singing was over Sri Ramakrishna went into the parlour, where Girish followed him. Girish asked, "Sir, will the crookedness of my mind ever be removed?" "Yes," replied Sri Ramakrishna. Thrice the question was repeated, and thrice the Master gave the same answer. Among the audience was Manomohan Mitra, who said, "You have been answered. Why be so troublesome?" Pocketing this affront Girish thought, "He is right. If a man cannot take another's word the first time, a hundred repetitions will not make him do so." He saluted the Master and returned to his theatre.

Some days after the above incident, Girish went to Dakshineswar and found Sri Ramakrishna seated on a blanket on the southern verandah of his room, talking with Bhavanath. Girish silently repeated the Mantra, "Guru is Brahma," etc., and saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to be seated and said, "Would you believe me, I was just speaking of you. You may ask him (pointing to Bhavanath)." Then he proceeded to instruct him. Girish interrupted, "I don't want to listen to instructions. I myself have written many such. It is of no use. Please help me in a more tangible way if you can." This pleased the Master, who asked Ramlal to repeat a particular Sanskrit verse, the purport of which was that even if he dwells in solitude or a mountain cave, a man without faith can achieve nothing. Girish felt pure for the time being. Who might this man be, he thought, who could make his proud head bow before him in veneration? Who was this remarkable personality at whose feet he had taken shelter and lost all fear? He asked eagerly, "Who are you, sir?"

The Master replied, "Some say that I am Ramprasad, others that I am Raja Ramakrishna. I live here." Girish bowed and rose to take leave. As the Master walked with him to the northern verandah Girish asked, "Sir, now that I have seen you, shall I continue to do as I am doing?" "Why, yes," replied Sri Ramakrishna. Girish felt from this that his connection with the theatre was not harmful. Already he was beginning to glimpse what a Guru really meant.

Girish became a steadfast devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master used to speak highly of his faith, which changed his evil propensities into noble attributes. Wonderful was his relationship with the Master! Shortcomings which would never be tolerated in others were patiently borne with in Girish. The Master knew that at heart Girish was tender, faithful, and sincere. One of the vices of Girish was his inordinate intemperance. One day, under its influence, he abused Sri Ramakrishna in the theatre, mortifying his devotees. The reason of the outburst was this: He desired to come into closer relationship with the Master, to have the Master become to him as a son. He thought that by doing so he might develop the devotional element which he felt to be lacking in his nature. But Sri Ramakrishna would not listen. He said spiritedly, "Why should I be your son? My father was a pure and pious man. I shall be your Guru, your Ishta." This loosed the tongue of Girish.

Shortly after, when Ramchandra went to Dakshineswar, the Master said to him, "Girish has abused me for nothing."

Ram: "You will have to bear with it."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But if he should beat me some time?"

Ram: "You will have to put up with that as well.

He can only give what he has. What could the snake[1] Kâliya offer to Krishna but its venom? So it is with Girish. Who but you would tolerate such treatment?"

Sri Ramakrishna was visibly moved. "Get me a coach," said he, "I shall go and see Girish immediately." He did not listen to the objections of the devotees, nor did he mind the noonday sun. When he reached the house of Girish, he found him smitten with anguish and remorse. The Master's kind and affectionate words banished his gloom. The evening was spent in song and dance, and Girish made a long stride towards complete self-surrender at the Master's feet.

One day a devotee complained to Sri Ramakrishna about the intemperance of Girish and begged him to advise him to give up liquor. Sri Ramakrishna sternly replied, "Why do you trouble your head about him? He who has taken charge of him will look after him. Girish is a devotee of the heroic type. I tell you, drinking will not affect him."

The Master knew that mere words could not induce a man to break deep-rooted habits. But the silent influence of his love worked miracles. Girish tried his best to conquer his love of drink, and succeeded to a certain extent. One day, however, he went to see an actress who was ill, and drank so much that he had to spend the night at her house. It was the first time he had ever slept in such a place. In the morning, when he had sobered up, he understood what had happened, and stung with remorse, started directly for Dakshineswar, not however without a flask of wine. Dismounting from the coach, he ran to the Master and clasping his feet, began to weep. In the mean time, Sri Ramakrishna told a devotee to take Girish's shoes, scarf, and flask from the coach. When Girish became calmer he felt a desire for a drink, and was much disturbed when he found that the carriage in which he had left the flask was gone. But the Master produced the flask, and Girish drank before all. When he realised what he had done, he was much ashamed. Sri Ramakrishna only said, "All right, enjoy yourself to your fill, it won't be for long." He knew that Girish would soon be purged of all dross. After this incident the latter seldom touched liquor.

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[1] This refers to an episode in the X Book of the *Bhagavata*.

One day, in the course of conversation, Sri Ramakrishna said to Girish that along with his work he must remember God at least in the morning and evening. He looked at Girish as if expecting a reply. "That is a very simple thing to do," Girish thought, "but I am a busy man with no fixed hours for food or sleep. I shall surely forget to remember God at those stated hours. So how can I promise that?" Sri Ramakrishna read his mind and said, "All right, if you cannot do that, remember God before meals and at bedtime." Girish was not willing to promise even that—such was the irregularity of his life; and besides he was by nature opposed to any hard and fast rule;—the slightest restraint was galling to him. Sri Ramakrishna realised his perplexity and said finally, "So you are unwilling to agree to this even. All right, give me your power of attorney. Henceforth I assume responsibility for you. You need not do anything." The Master was in one of his exalted moods when he said these words.

Girish heaved a sigh of relief. Now he had just what he had wanted. He was overwhelmed by the infinite love and compassion of the Master which freed him from the tasks of atoning for his past sins and preparing for a future life. He said to himself, "Ah, now I am saved. I shall now be free as air, and my bark will be guided to the haven of peace by his infinite power." He did not see at first that he had given up his freedom and made of himself Sri Ramakrishna's captive. The fact that he had to relinquish all personal initiative and submit to the will of the Master in everything, was not evident at once. His only thought was that his teacher had taken entire charge of him.

Sri Ramakrishna's training of Girish henceforth was in accordance with this new attitude. One day Girish said about some trifling matter, "Yes, I shall do this." "No, no," corrected the Master, "You must not speak in this dogmatic way. Suppose you fail to do it? Say, 'God willing, I shall do it'." Girish understood. Thenceforth he tried to give up all idea of personal responsibility and to become a willing instrument of the Divine Will. Naturally his mind constantly dwelt on Sri Ramakrishna. This unconscious meditation in time chastened his turbulent spirit.

THE MARCH OF EVENTS

In January, 1884, the Master was walking alone in the garden at Dakshineswar, when he went into a trance. There was none to support him or to guide his footsteps, and he fell dislocating one of the bones of his left arm. Medical aid was sought, and the disciples were all very anxious until he recovered. The pain at times was very acute. At one time he would make light of it, at another he would go into Samadhi and lose all consciousness of the body and its pains. We describe here the incidents of one day, the 2nd of February, 1884. The Master was seated on his cot, and Rakhal, Mahima Charan, Hazra, and others were in the room. Mahendra entered and saluted the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima): "Well, 'I am the You are now better, I hope?"

Mahendra: "Yes, sir."

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima): "Well, 'I am the instrument, and Thou art the operator.'—How then did this accident take place?"

Mahima Charan made no reply. After some time the Master felt hungry and asked Mahendra to show what he had brought for him. Suddenly at the sight of Rakhal he went into Samadhi.

The trance broke. To compose himself the Master said a few times, "I shall have some sweets, I shall drink water."

Again like a boy he was appealing to the Mother with tears, "Mother Divine, why didst Thou do this with me? Oh, my hand is aching so much." (To the devotees present) "Shall I ever get well?" The devotees consoled him like a child saying, "Certainly."

Sri Ramakrishna (to Rakhal): "Though you are here as a bodyguard, you are not to blame. Even you could not have saved me."

The Master was again in an exalted mood. He kept repeating, "Om, Om, Om! Mother, is it I who am speaking? Don't take away my senses, Mother, by giving me Knowledge of Brahman—don't give me Brahma-Jnana, Mother. Am I not your child, and naturally timid? I must have my Mother. I bow to Brahma-Jnana a million times. Give it to those who want it. Thou Blissful Mother! O Thou Blissful Mother!"

He wept aloud as he uttered this. Then quoting from a song of Ramprasad he sang: "Ah, that's why I grieve. Thou art with me, Mother, and I am wide awake, but still I have been hoodwinked!"

He addressed the Mother again, "Did I do anything wrong, Mother? Do I ever do anything? Isn't it Thou who dost all? I am the instrument, and Thou art the operator."

He was again smiling and talking—just as a boy, in spite of serious illness, is sometimes jolly and plays. He said to Mahima and others, "Unless you realise the Lord, you get nothing." He went on to say that one must have intense yearning for God. He said, "Since He is our parent, we have a legitimate share in His house. God is our own Father, our own Mother, and we can always use force with Him, 'Reveal Thyself, or I will commit suicide!'

"I used to call on the Mother thus: 'Mother, O Thou Blissful Mother, Thou must reveal Thyself to me.' Sometimes I would say, 'O Thou Lord of the miserable, Thou Lord of the universe, I am not surely outside the universe. I am without knowledge, without spiritual practice, without devotion—I know nothing,—come to me, my Lord, out of Thy sheer grace!' "

The Master's tone was plaintive; the devotees were deeply moved, and Mahima Charan was weeping. Looking at the latter the Master quoted Ramprasad:

"Call on the Mother with real yearning, and She cannot stay away!"

Some devotees came from Sibpur. As they had come such a distance, the Master spoke with them, exhorting them to seek God first—to pray to Him wholeheartedly, for a few seconds at least, morning and evening. He told them that until one was satiated with enjoyment of the world, one could not get yearning for God.

About five o'clock Dr. Madhusudan came to bandage the Master's arm. Sri Ramakrishna was smiling like a boy, and punning on the doctor's name said, "Madhusudan is the refuge, here and hereafter. Isn't that so?"

Doctor: "Ah, I am only burdened with a name."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why, you must not minimise the value of a name. The Lord and His name are identical. When Satyabhâmâ (Sri Krishna's queen) weighed the Lord, putting Him in one scale and a heap of gold and jewellery in the other, the latter was not sufficient. But when Rukmini (another queen) put a Tulasi leaf with the name of Krishna on it in the other scale, it balanced the Lord."

In order that the doctor might bandage the arm, a bed was spread on the floor, and Sri Ramakrishna lay on it. He sang a song of Radha's bereavement—"Radha is in her last (death-like) stage. Ah, says Vrindâ, what else is in store for her?" After the dressing was over, the Master said, "I have not much faith in the Calcutta physicians. Shambhu (Mallik) was delirious. But the attending physician said, 'It is nothing. It is due to the action of the drug.' Shortly after Shambhu died!"

The evening service was over in the temples. Adhar came and saluted the Master.

Adhar: "How are you, sir?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "See—how the hand was hurt! (Smiling) Don't ask about my health!"

He asked Adhar to massage his feet lightly. Then he began to talk with Mahima Charan.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Mahima): "Devotion for devotion's sake—if you can do this, it will be well. 'I don't want liberation, fame, riches, or recovery from sickness, nothing, I only want Thee'—this is called devotion for devotion's sake. A rich man has many visitors who come to him with definite personal motives. But if there is one among them who wants nothing but comes out of love, the rich man gradually grows to love him. Prahlada had this kind of devotion—pure love for God, without any motive."

Mahima Charan was silent. The Master then said, "All right. Let me talk of something that will be to your liking." He then spoke on Vedanta and asked Mahima to recite some hymns. Mahima quoted from the *Uttara Gita*: "The twice-born worship God in the fire, the sages in their own heart, the ignorant in images, and the even-minded everywhere."

When the Master heard the last verse of the stanza, he suddenly stood up and went into Samadhi! After some time he came back to normal and seated himself. Then he asked Mahima to recite Nârada's beautiful lines in which devotion was made to be the ultimate object. After this Mahima gave Shankara's Six Stanzas on Nirvana the burden of which was: "I am Knowledge and Bliss Absolute, I am Shiva, I am Shiva." Every time Mahima quoted this last line, Sri Ramakrishna said smiling, "Not I, not I, but Thou, Thou art Knowledge and Bliss Absolute!"

Referring to this day's incident the Master said soon after to some of his disciples, "Mother has put me in such a state that I can conceal nothing. It is the state of a child. Rakhal does not fully understand that. Lest anybody should know that my arm is broken and speak ill of me, he covers it. He called Dr. Madhusudan aside to tell him all about the case. At this I shouted, 'Well, Madhusudan, come and see—I have broken my arm!' "

The injured arm took several months to heal. But the flow of the Master's spiritual discourses and the joy in the minds of his devotees continued unabated. He was almost recovered by May.

The devotees used to celebrate the Master's birthday every year. But this year, owing to the accident, the celebration was postponed till the 25th of May. They used to dress him in an ochre cloth, put garlands about his neck and offer flowers and sandal-paste at his feet—all this in accordance with the prevailing custom of worshipping the Guru. Devotional music was played throughout the day, and the Master would give his usual talks and occasionally fall into trances. The devotees brought him various delicacies, and ate what was left. The whole day and part of the evening were passed in this way; the devotees after being blessed by the Master generally dispersed at night.

During this year we have on record that the Master visited the Star Theatre twice—once on September 21st, to see the "Life of Sri Chaitanya", and again on December 14th, to witness the "Life of Prahlada". The Star

Theatre was then in Beadon Street, Calcutta. On the first occasion a devotee named Mahendra Nath Mukherjee brought the Master in his carriage from Dakshineswar. The Manager, Girish Chandra Ghosh, received him and seated him in a box. Baburam, M., and one or two others were present. The Master enjoyed the performance and shed tears or fell into Samadhi whenever he heard an appealing song or dialogue. He had cautioned the devotees in advance to be quiet when he was in Samadhi, lest outsiders should think that he was shamming. Now and then he made approving comments on particular episodes. A young man of Nityananda's line, from Khardaha, came and stood behind the Master. Sri Ramakrishna was much pleased to see him, asked him to sit down and treated him very cordially. After he had gone, the Master said to his devotees, "He is a scholar, and his father is a great devotee. When I went to see Shyâmsundar at Khardaha, the father brought for me that Prasad which a hundred rupees would not have procured. The young man shows signs of spirituality. A slight stimulation will awake him spiritually. His presence almost threw me into a trance."

The play was over. Sri Ramakrishna stepped into the coach, and in answer to a query said smilingly, "I found the representation as real as the original scene." On the way he kept saying to himself in an exalted mood, "O Krishna! Krishna that is knowledge, Krishna that is life, Krishna that is the mind, Krishna that is the Soul, Krishna that is the body!" And again, "Govinda, my life, my Soul!"

In his mill at Baghbazar, Mukherjee entertained the Master with refreshments, after which the latter left for Dakshineswar.

On the second occasion Baburam, M., and others accompanied the Master. Before the opening of the play, Girish Chandra had a little talk with him.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Well, you have written fine things!"

Girish: "Sir, I haven't assimilated the ideas. I only wrote about them. That's all."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, you have assimilated them. Didn't I tell you the other day, unless one has devotion at heart, one cannot portray gods and goddesses?"

Girish: "I sometimes think of giving up this theatrical business. I have had enough of it already."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no. Let it be. It will be a source of education to many."

The performance commenced. The child Prahlada came to school. At the very sight of him the Master uttered "Prahlada! Prahlada!" and entered into Samadhi! Seeing the boy under the elephant's feet, and again in the midst of flames, he wept. The scene of the anxiety of Narayana and Lakshmi for Prahlada put the Master again into Samadhi.

After the performance, Girish asked him if he would like to see a farce that was to follow. The Master said, "No, what's all this after the 'Life of Prahlada'! I said to Gopal Uriâs[1] troupe that they should conclude their performance with some spiritual topic. The introduction of worldly topics at the end mars the whole effect of the religious piece that has gone before."

Asked by Girish how he enjoyed the play, the Master said, "I saw that He Himself had become all. The actresses seemed like visible forms of the Divine Mother. Those who played the rôle of the cowherds of

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[1] A popular Yâtrâwâlâ (manager of an itinerant theatrical troupe).

Goloka (the Lord's abode), I found to be Narayana Himself. He himself had become all these."

While the Master was having an interesting discourse with Girish in his private room, some one came and asked if he would like to see the farce, which had commenced. Sri Ramakrishna said to Girish, "What's this that you have done! It is like beginning with sweets and ending with bitters."

After the play, the actresses, under instructions from Girish, came to salute the Master. Some of them even touched his feet. The Master did not object, but only said, with great tenderness in the voice, "That will do, mother, that will do!"

After they had gone, he remarked to the devotees, "He is all in different forms!"

The Master rose. Girish and others saw him off. As soon as he was in the carriage, he went into Samadhi.

Mention has already been made of the sudden fits of ravenous hunger to which the Master was subject in an earlier period of his life. These were frequent later at Dakshineswar. Brought on by certain exalted moods, they produced no bad effects in the way of indigestion. We may mention two instances here.

One day several ladies came to see him while he was visiting Mahendra in Calcutta. One of them had brought a large quantity of some milk preparation as a present for the Master. This they left with Ramlal, and went to Mahendra's house in Calcutta to see him. Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar at half past ten. A little later he felt very hungry and asked Ramlal for some food. The latter produced the milk preparation, and the Master ate nearly the whole of it. The next day, when she came again to Dakshineswar, he said, "Well, I ate almost the whole of your present, and had no trouble in consequence."

Another time at midnight the Master awoke and told Ramlal that he was exceedingly hungry. It so happened that on this particular occasion there were no sweets in the house. So Ramlal informed the Holy Mother at the concert-room, who with the help of some women devotees quickly prepared a large quantity of Hâluâ, and sent it through one of the women. When she reached the Master's room, she found him pacing gravely to and fro in an exalted mood. A lamp was burning dimly, and only Ramlal was there. Owing to the accession of divine fervour, the Master appeared much larger in stature than usual and seemed scarcely of this earth. With a sense of awe, she placed the food before a carpet upon which the Master was to sit. Sri Ramakrishna sat down, and in that semi-conscious state he ate all the food. Seeing that she was gazing at him, and reading her mind he asked, "Who do you think is eating? I or some one else?" She replied, "It seems as if some one else were within you and it is he who is eating." "Rightly said," replied Sri Ramakrishna smiling.

In fact, divine ecstasy produced in the Master strange results. Sometimes it expressed itself as a total lack of control over the body, so that he reeled and tottered as he walked, like a man under the influence of liquor. It was often mistaken for actual drunkenness. One day, as the Master was walking to Ram Babu's house, he was overcome by some divine idea; his gait became so unsteady, that he had to be supported by two devotees. Some bystanders, who did not know the Master, remarked in an audible whisper, "How dreadfully drunk he is!" Some of the devotees caught the words and said to themselves, "Yes, indeed!"

Another day, at Dakshineswar, the Master went to the Kali temple and returned from it in a state of ecstasy, with flushed face and tottering steps. Meeting the Holy Mother he asked her, "Well, am I drunk?" "Certainly not," replied the Holy Mother. "Then why do I behave like this?" asked the Master again. The Holy Mother answered, "You have but tasted the bliss of the Divine Mother!" "Well said," he replied, much pleased.

On another occasion, in a carriage on the way to Jadu Mallik's Calcutta house, with Latu and two other devotees, his eyes suddenly fell upon a tavern by the road-side, where a number of customers were making themselves merry over the wine-bottle. The scene at once suggested to him the Divine Mother, the Fountain-head of Bliss. Forgetting where he was, he stood up, half leaning out of the carriage, and cheered the group exclaiming, "Bravo! Excellent!" For the time being he seemed to be one of them! One of the devotees, fearing that he might fall, was about to catch hold of him, when Latu stopped him saying that the Master would check himself of his own accord. Presently the tavern was left behind, and the Master was soon himself again.

Between the years 1882 and 1884 we find Sri Ramakrishna paying two visits to the Brahmo Samaj at Sinthi and another to the Brahmo Samaj at Nandan Bâgân, both places in the vicinity of Calcutta. The first of the visits to Sinthi was to Benimâdhav Pâl's garden-house on the occasion of the half-yearly celebration of the Samaj. Pundit Shivanath Shastri was present. The Master accosted him with the words, "Ah, Shivanath, here you are! Well, you are devotees, and I am glad to see you. A habitual smoker of hemp heartily welcomes another hemp-smoker. Perhaps he embraces him!" Then he treated the audience to a spiritual discourse of absorbing interest, after which there was a Sankirtana. The devotees sang and danced encircling Sri Ramakrishna, who joined enthusiastically in it. At the end of the Sankirtana the Master saluted the Divine Mother, touching the ground with his forehead and said, "*Bhagavata,* Bhakta, Bhagavan! Salutation to the Jnani and to the Bhakta, to the Bhakta who believes in Divine forms as well as to him who believes in His Impersonal aspect! Salutation to the Brahmajnanis of ancient times and to those of the Brahmo Samaj of today!"

Benimadhav entertained Sri Ramakrishna and the assembled devotees with a sumptuous repast.

The Master's second visit to this Samaj was in October, 1884. In the assemblage there were Vijay, Trailokya, and a Brahmo Sub-Judge. Trailokya's songs threw the Master repeatedly into Samadhi. The Master had a very interesting conversation with the Sub-Judge, which we reproduce in part.

Sub-Judge: "We are householders; how long should we attend to our duties?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You must bring up your children, maintain your wife, and make provision for her maintenance after you are gone. If you don't do this, you are cruel; and a man who has no compassion is not worth the name of man."

Sub-Judge: "How long should we maintain our children?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Until they attain majority. When the young bird is sufficiently grown up, the mother pecks at it and forces it to leave the nest."

Sub-Judge: "What are our duties to our wives?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "In your lifetime you must give her religious instructions, and maintain her. If she is faithful, you must make provision for her maintenance after your death. But when one is mad for realisation, duties cease; in that case the Lord takes care of the family. When a zemindar dies leaving a minor son, the Court of Wards takes charge of that boy. These are legal matters, which must be familiar to you."

Trailokya: "Sir, can a man have real knowledge while leading a householder's life? Can he realise God?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Why, you have harmonised both, haven't you? Though you are in the world, yet you think of God. It is certainly possible to have realisation as a householder. When the very name of God brings tears to your eyes and makes your hair stand on end, know that the attachment to lust and gold is gone, and you have realised God. If a match is dry, it ignites at a single stroke. But if it is damp, even fifty of them won't light—they are only wasted."

A devotee: "Sir, shall a man be reborn if he fails to reflect on God at the time of death, even though he has often thought much of Him during his lifetime?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Men think of God, but have no faith. They forget Him and become attached to the world. As an elephant after it has taken a bath throws dust over its body, so it is with the mind and the world. But if just after the washing the elephant is put into its stable, it has no opportunity to become dirty again. Similarly, if a man reflects on God at the time of death, his mind is purified, and there is no further chance to be contaminated by lust and wealth."

The discourse was followed by a religious song in which the Master took part. Vijay then conducted the prayer, after which Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees had refreshments. Then the Master talked with Vijay about harmony of all religions and the efficacy of prayer. It was past ten when he set out to return to Dakshineswar.

The Nandan Bagan Brahmo Samaj was situated at the late Kâshishwar Mitra's house. His sons, continuing the practice of their father, had a celebration in May, 1884, and invited Sri Ramakrishna to it. Rakhal, Mahendra, and others accompanied the Master.

Questioned by a Brahmo devotee as to the best way of controlling the passions, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Turn the course of the passions towards God. For instance, have the desire of union with the Self. Be angry with those that stand in the way of God. Cultivate the hankering to realise Him. If you have to talk of 'me and mine', do so only with God, refer to Him as 'My Krishna', or 'My Rama'. If you will be proud, be proud like Vibhishana who said, 'I have bent this head before Rama, and I won't bend it before anybody else!' "

The devotee: "If He is causing everything to be done, how are we responsible for our sins?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Duryodhana also said the same thing: 'Thou, O Krishna, art seated in the heart, and as Thou directest, so I act.' Well, he who sincerely believes that God and not he himself is the heart; and as Thou directest, so I act.' Well, he a false step. But until the heart is purified, one can't even believe that God exists!"

The proceedings were over at about nine o'clock, and the Master was anxious to return home. But the hosts were too busy with their householder guests to pay any attention to Sri Ramakrishna. He said to Rakhal in fun, "Well, where's the supper?"

Rakhal (indignantly): "Sir, let us go back to Dakshineswar."

Sri Ramakrishna (amused at Rakhal's seriousness): "Wait, who will pay the carriage-hire?[1] And where shall we sup at this hour?"

After a long interval the call to supper came. All went upstairs in a body, and Sri Ramakrishna with Rakhal and others had to force his way through the crowd. There was no place for them to sit. With great difficulty a seat—not very clean—was found for the Master. A curry was served which Sri Ramakrishna would not touch because he felt the impurity of the person who was serving. He ate a few Puris with salt and a little sweet.

When the Master got into his carriage it was discovered that the carriage-hire had not been paid. Knowing that the hosts were young, and that any discourtesy on their part was due to inexperience, he sent some of his disciples to them for the money. Sri Ramakrishna afterwards spoke in fun of this incident to his devotees: "When they went to ask for the carriage-hire of three rupees and two annas they were at first curtly refused! Reluctantly three rupees were given, but not the two annas! They said, 'That will do!' "

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[1] When one invites a holy man with his disciples, one is expected to pay for the carriage.

DEVENDRA AND KALIPADA

Devendranath Mazumdar, brother of the famous Bengali poet Surendranath Mazumdar, was a middle-aged man of quiet disposition who worked in a zemindar's office and lived with a relative in Calcutta. He had doubts of the existence of God, which were not removed by discussion. He had a strong desire to realise God, but did not know the necessary steps to take to attain that end; so he decided to seek the aid of a Guru. "But he must be a real Guru," he thought and fervently prayed to God to send him one.

As his longing for God intensified he could not sleep. The thought, "If God exists, why does He not reveal Himself to me?" bothered him night and day. One morning he decided to go to Bhagavan Das, the celebrated Vaishnava saint of Kalna and take initiation from him. But he missed the steamer. A friend whom he went to see was not at home. He opened a book at random. In a foot-note on the page before him was written: "This is also the opinion of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa of Rasmani's Kali temple at Dakshineswar." "Ramakrishna Paramahamsa!" he said to himself, "Why, a Paramahamsa is a saint who has realised God. Perhaps he can help me to reach my goal?" He decided to visit Sri Ramakrishna, set out at once for Dakshineswar and reached the temple garden about noon. From the boat he could see a man with an arm in a sling standing in the garden. Devendra landed and asked where the Paramahamsa lived. A room was pointed out to him. There was no one in the room when he went there, and he was waiting in the verandah, when a plainly dressed man in slippers, the skirt of his cloth thrown across his shoulder, came in. He recognised him as the man whom he had seen from the boat, and concluded that he must be the Paramahamsa. He bowed before him, and the Master asked him to enter by the northern door. Seeing that he was taking off his shoes at some distance, Sri Ramakrishna advised him to come nearer before removing them, so that they might not be stolen. Then he asked him whence he came. "From Calcutta," replied Devendranath. "To see the Deity in this form, maybe?"—posing as Sri Krishna with His flute. "No, sir," said Devendra. "I have come to see you." "To see me!" repeated the Master. "Ah, what is there to see in me? Look, I have broken my arm. Oh, what pain!" He made Devendra feel his injured arm and said, "Will you see if the bone has been fractured? It is so painful!" Devendra examined again and asked how he had met with that accident. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Some times I fall into a peculiar state, and the arm was broken on one of those occasions. The pain increases when any medicine is used. So I have stopped using any medicine. Do you think I shall recover?" Devendra said, "Yes, certainly." In a moment all trace of pain seemed to disappear. He called out like a boy to the bystanders, "Look here, this gentleman from Calcutta says that my arm will get well!"

Devendra saw that Sri Ramakrishna's body was as delicate as a woman's and his mind as frank as a child's. He said to himself, "What a strange man he is! He takes me for an oracle. Is it possible for a man to be so artless? Or is it all a hoax?" But the Master's childlike behaviour dispelled all his doubts. In the course of conversation Sri Ramakrishna explained the significance of divine love. Then he asked a young devotee to give Devendra something to eat.

After some time Sri Ramakrishna said to Devendra, "Many respectable Brahmins eat here. It is a temple, and there can be no objection to your taking Prasad with us. The day is already advanced. Do not leave now." Calling Ramlal he said, "Give Devendra the Prasad from the Vishnu temple."[1] Devendra was astonished—how did Sri Ramakrishna know that he was a vegetarian? Could he read men's hearts? He ate his meal and eagerly asked from Ramlal details about the Master's life. His mind was in a state of wonderment.

In the afternoon the Master asked, "Why do you look so pale? Are you ill?" Devendra was having a relapse of his old malarial fever. Sri Ramakrishna became extremely anxious and when Baburam came, asked him to take Devendra to Calcutta. As they were leaving, Sri Ramakrishna requested Devendra to come and see him without fail after he recovered.

Devendra lay unconscious for six weeks. In delirium he was often heard to mutter the name of Sri Ramakrishna. He fancied that he was at Dakshineswar, and curiously enough, whenever excessive pain caused him to open his eyes, he would see the Master seated by his bed. On recovery he dismissed these visions as mere hallucinations and gave up all thought of visiting Sri Ramakrishna again, thinking his relapse to be the result of his trip to Dakshineswar.

A few months passed in this wise. The desire to realise God was not so keen now, but it had not disappeared altogether. Whenever the idea of visiting Dakshineswar cropped up in his mind, it would be checked by a thought of the fever. As an alternative, he began to practise the Gâyatri. But this produced unexpected results. It revived his yearning for God and for a competent Guru. But he could not make up his mind to go to see Sri Ramakrishna. One day, while returning from his office he stopped at a friend's house, but he was out; while he waited for his return he chanced to see the following item of news in a Bengali newspaper: "Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa will meet his devotees this evening at the house of Srijut Balaram Bose of Baghbazar." This was sufficient. All the arguments against visiting the Master disappeared in a moment. Unable to resist any longer, he started at once for Baghbazar and sought the place at dusk. There was a great gathering. Sri Ramakrishna was dancing in ecstasy; some were singing, and others were dancing around him. The whole place thrilled with joy. Devendra watched the scene, but did not dare to face the Master after his long absence. Sri Ramakrishna joined now and then in the song as he danced. When the Kirtana was finished and Sri Ramakrishna had almost regained his normal mood, there was a rush to touch his feet. Devendra saw that this was an opportunity to salute him without attracting attention. He elbowed his way through the crowd and touched his feet. Just then he felt a gentle tap on the back and heard a familiar voice asking, "Hullo, you are here! Why haven't you been coming to Dakshineswar? I often think of you. You are all right now, I hope?" "Sir," said Devendra apologetically, "I was bed-ridden for a long time." Then the Master—for it was he—eagerly said, "You must come again. Do you hear?" Devendra's heart melted at this kindness. "Yes, sir," he said, "I will."

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[1] The Vaishnavites are vegetarians; the Shaktas may or may not be meat-eaters.

He kept his promise and soon tasted the bliss of the divine company of the Master. He carried on his Sadhana according to his directions and was blessed with various realisations. Afterwards he felt a strong desire to give up the world and begged the Master's blessing, but he was advised to live as a householder as it would not stand in the way of his spiritual progress; and so he remained in the world.

One day, a lady belonging to a respectable Hindu family came to Dakshineswar ostensibly to visit Rani Rasmani's Kali temple, but really to see Sri Ramakrishna about whom she had heard. While her companions were visiting the temples, she quietly entered the Master's room. With tears in her eyes she told him that her husband, really a good and sincere man, sought bad company and had contracted evil habits. She prayed to the Master to bless her and to suggest some way of influencing him towards good. Sri Ramakrishna consoled her and said that her husband was really a devotee of God, and that ere long he would come to Dakshineswar. With this assurance she returned home much comforted.

Her husband, Kâlipada Ghosh, held an important position in Messrs John Dickinson & Co., and was an intimate friend of Girish Chandra Ghosh, from whom he heard one day about Sri Ramakrishna. Out of curiosity to see the man about whom he had heard so many strange things, he hired a boat and went to Dakshineswar. He found the Master's room crowded with devotees. Sri Ramakrishna welcomed him cordially as if he were an old acquaintance. When a few minutes later the Master expressed a desire to go to Calcutta, Kalipada put himself and the boat at the Master's disposal. The Master accepted the offer and, accompanied by Latu, went to Calcutta. On the way Sri Ramakrishna asked Kalipada what particular manifestation of the Divinity he preferred. "I adore the goddess Kali, my namesake," replied Kalipada. "Are you initiated?" inquired the Master. "No, sir," said Kalipada: "But I shall most gladly take initiation from you if you will kindly consent to be my Guru." Up to this time he had had no faith in human Gurus; in fact he was determined to accept only God Himself as spiritual guide. Yet at the very first contact with Sri Ramakrishna, he surrendered to him like a child. With a smile Sri Ramakrishna asked him to put out his tongue. He wrote some mystic syllables on it with his finger, telling him that this was the initiation. Only a few fortunate ones were initiated in this way. The boat arrived in Calcutta, but the Master had no particular destination and suggested going to Kalipada's, which pleased the latter greatly. Kalipada afterwards became one of the most devoted of disciples. He was of the "heroic" type of Bhaktas.

SHASHI, SHARAT, HARI, GANGADHAR, SARADA, TULASI, AND HARIPRASANNA

Shashibhushan and Sharatchandra Chakravarti, two cousins, of a pious Brahmin family of Calcutta, were members of a Brahmo organisation started under the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen, and learned of Sri Ramakrishna from some fellow-members of the association who had seen the Master at the Brahmo Samaj. The members of this society resolved to celebrate their anniversary at Dakshineswar, where they would enjoy the company of Sri Ramakrishna. On a certain day in October, 1883, they arrived at the garden. Shashi and Sharat went to see the Master and found him seated on the small bedstead in his room. Sri Ramakrishna received them with a smile and had a mat spread on the floor where they were to sit. He asked them their names and where they lived, and was pleased to hear that they belonged to Keshab's Brahmo Samaj. Then he said, "Bricks and tiles, if burnt after the trademark has been stamped on them, retain those marks for ever. Similarly you should be stamped with spirituality before entering the world. Then you will not become attached. But nowadays parents marry their boys too young. By the time they finish their education, they are already the fathers of children and have to run hither and thither in search of a job to maintain the family. They find it difficult to secure an appointment with sufficient salary to feed so many mouths. So they have little time to think of God." "Then, sir, is it wrong to marry? Is it against the will of God?" asked one of the boys. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to take down one of the books from the shelf and read aloud an extract from the Bible setting forth Christ's opinion on marriage: "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive let him receive." And St Paul's: "I say, therefore, to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." When the passage was read, Sri Ramakrishna remarked that marriage was the root of all bondage. One among the audience interrupted him saying, "Do you mean to say, sir, that marriage is against the will of God? And how can His creation go on if people cease to marry?" Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said, "Don't worry about that. Those who like to marry are at perfect liberty to do so. What I said just now was between ourselves. I say what I have got to say; you may take as much or as little of it as you like." He asked Shashi whether he believed in God with form or without form. With characteristic frankness the boy answered, "I am not certain about the very existence of God, so I am not able to speak one way or the other!" The reply pleased the Master very much.

After some time, the boys returned home. Shashi and Sharat were fascinated by the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. They said to themselves, "Henceforth we shall visit this holy man. If one wishes to learn the secret of spirituality, one must go to him." From his boyhood Shashi cherished a great regard for religious books. The Bible and the lives of Sri Gauranga and other saints were among his favourite books. Prayer, meditation and worship were part of his daily occupation. His hankering for God was evidenced by his regular attendance at the Brahmo Samaj. He was a brilliant student and was preparing for the First Examination in Arts when he met the Master. Naturally his parents built great hopes on him. But Shashi bade adieu to all worldly prospects as soon as he had a glimpse of something higher through his contact with Sri Ramakrishna. He soon became one of the inner circle of the Master's followers and made him the pole-star of his life.

Sharat was not behind his cousin in his appreciation of Sri Ramakrishna and became a great devotee. At the first sight the Master noticed his stern spirit of renunciation. One day the Master was seated in his room at Dakshineswar, surrounded by a group of devotees. Ganesha, the Hindu god of success, was the topic of conversation. The Master praised highly the integrity of character of this deity, his utter absence of passion and single-minded devotion to his mother, the goddess Durga. In this connection he narrated some anecdotes from the Hindu mythology which brought the divine character of Ganesha vividly before his audience. Young Sharat was present. Suddenly he said, "Well, sir, I like the character of Ganesha very much. He is my ideal." The Master at once corrected him saying, "No, Ganesha is not your ideal. Your ideal is Shiva. You possess Shiva-attributes." Then he added, "Think of yourself, always, as Shiva and of me as Shakti. I am the fountain of all your power (Shakti)." It is not for us ordinary mortals to understand the significance of this mystic utterance. But it is none the less a fact that Sharat in later years showed in a wonderful degree a spirit of calmness, fortitude, forbearance, sympathy for others, and readiness to share their burdens, which are the special characteristics of Shiva. He realised perfectly that Sri Ramakrishna was the repository of the powers which enabled him to attain success in his individual spiritual life as well as in the great Ramakrishna Order.

One day the Master asked Sharat, "How would you like to realise God? What divine visions do you prefer to see in meditation?" Sharat replied, "I do not want to see any particular form of God in meditation. I want to see Him as manifested in all creatures of the world. I do not like visions." The Master said with a smile, "That is the last word in spiritual attainment. You cannot have it all at once." "But I won't be satisfied with anything short of that," replied the boy, "I shall trudge on in the path of religious practice till that blessed state arrives."

Of Shashi and Sharat Sri Ramakrishna used to say that both of them were followers of Jesus the Christ in a former incarnation.

Another great disciple who was attracted by the magnetic personality of Sri Ramakrishna was Harinath Chatterjee of Baghbazar. Orphaned when quite young, he was reared by his brother. He became the leader among his chums, and his love of justice made him an influence for good. His relatives were amazed at his spiritual fervour even in boyhood. Like a real orthodox Brahmin he bathed thrice a day and cooked his own meals, which he offered to God before eating. He arose every morning before sunrise and recited the whole Gita from memory. He had a passion for the Vedanta philosophy; Shankara moulded his life, and the Advaita Vedanta left an indelible impress upon his mind. He tried to live according to Vedanta and succeeded in some measure. One day, while bathing in the Ganges, he perceived something moving on the surface of the water at a few yards' distance from him. People on the bank shouted that it was a crocodile. He hurried towards the shore, but the next moment he thought, "What a coward I am! Do I not read every day that I am the immortal Soul? And now I am skulking before a crocodile!" He retracted his steps and finished his bath, not however without some little trepidation.

His elder brother, who was his guardian, did not thwart his religious pursuits, and silenced friends who complained of the queer conduct of the boy, by saying, "Why, he is doing just what we and everybody else ought to do." The following is his own version of his first encounter with Sri Ramakrishna: "I first met the Master in the house of Dinanath Bose of Baghbazar when I was a boy of thirteen or fourteen. The Master at that time remained mostly in Samadhi. The news that the Paramahamsa would come was circulated, and on the appointed day I went to get a view of the man. Soon a hackney carriage with two passengers in it stopped in front of the house. A stout, strong man, with forehead painted with vermilion and a gold amulet on his right arm, alighted from it. It was Hriday. He helped the other person—who was no other than Sri Ramakrishna—to alight, holding him by the hand. The Master was thin and emaciated. He wore a shirt, and one end of his cloth was tied round the waist. He appeared to be totally unconscious of the world. When I got a better view of him, I saw that his face was surrounded with a halo. The thought immediately flashed in my mind, 'I have read about Shukadeva in the books. Is this then a man like him?' Supported by his nephew, he walked to the room with tottering gait. Regaining a little consciousness of the world, he saw a large portrait of Kali on the wall and bowed his head before it. Then he sang a song depicting the oneness of Krishna and Kali which thrilled the audience."

Two or three years afterwards Harinath met the Master again at Dakshineswar. It was a holiday, and a crowd of devotees had assembled. Sri Ramakrishna took him aside and bade him come on any day but a holiday, when he would be freer to talk. Harinath became passionately attached to the Master. He had never heard such words of wisdom before. It seemed to him that in spite of his illiteracy, the man of Dakshineswar had assimilated the real import of the Shastras. One day, after they had been intimately acquainted, the young devotee said to the Master, "Sir, how pleasant and joyous is everything belonging to this place! Calcutta seems like hell in comparison." "Why," said Sri Ramakrishna to cheer him, "you are a servant of the Lord Hari, and His servant can never be unhappy anywhere." "But I don't know that I am His servant," said the boy. The Master reiterated, "Truth does not depend upon anybody's knowledge of it. Whether you know it or not, you are a servant of the Lord." This reassured Harinath.

From an early age Harinath had an abhorrence for women. He did not allow even little girls to come near him. One day in answer to an inquiry from the Master on this subject, he said, "Oh, I cannot bear them." "You talk like a fool!" said the Master reprovingly: "Look down upon woman! What for? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Bow down to them as to your mother and hold them in respect. That is the only way to escape their influence. The more you hate them, the more you will fall into the snare." These fiery words penetrated the heart of Harinath and changed his entire outlook on women. "Sir," he asked the Master another day, "how is one to be aware of the dawn of knowledge?" Sri Ramakrishna replied, "A man does not jump about when he gets illumination. Outwardly he remains as he was; but his entire perspective of the world is changed. The touch of the philosopher's stone converts a steel sword into gold. It retains its former shape intact, but it can no longer kill—it has become soft."

Like a true Vedantin, Harinath lived a life of asceticism and continence. The deeper he dived into Vedanta, the more its lofty ideal appealed to him. Plunged in the study of books on this subject, he did not come to Dakshineswar for some days. Sri Ramakrishna noticed his absence and said to him one day, "Hullo, you do not come here now so frequently. They say you are studying and meditating on Vedanta nowadays. It is good. But what does the Vedanta philosophy teach? Brahman alone is real and everything else is unreal—isn't that its substance or is there anything more? Then why don't you give up the unreal and cling to the real?" These words threw a new light on Vedanta and turned Hari's thoughts in a new direction. A few days later Sri Ramakrishna went to Calcutta and sent for Harinath; when he came, he found the Master in a state of semi-consciousness. "It is not easy to see the world of phenomena as unreal," the Master began addressing the assembled devotees: "This knowledge is impossible without the special grace of God. Mere personal effort is powerless to confer this realisation. A man is after all a tiny creature, with very limited powers. What an infinitesimal part of truth can he grasp by himself!" Harinath felt as if these words were directed to him, for he had been straining every nerve to attain illumination. The

Master then sang a song eulogising the miraculous power of divine grace. Tears flowed down his cheeks, literally wetting the ground. Harinath was deeply moved. He, too, burst into tears. After that he learned to surrender himself at the feet of the Lord.

Sri Ramakrishna loved Harinath dearly and used to speak highly of his great spiritual potentialities. Once the young man did not come to Dakshineswar for a number of days. When at last he came the Master said to him in a voice choked with emotion, "Why don't you come here? I love to see you all, because I know that you are God's special favourites. Otherwise what can I expect from you? You have not the means to offer me a pice worth of presents, nor have you a tattered mat to spread on the floor when I go to your house. And still I love you so much. Don't fail to come here,[1] for this is where you will achieve everything. If you are sure to find God elsewhere, go there by all means. What I want is that you realise God, transcend the misery of the world and enjoy divine beatitude. Anyhow try to attain it in this life. But the Mother tells me that you will realise God without any effort if you only come here. So I insist upon your coming." As he spoke thus he actually wept.

Gangâdhar Ghatak was a friend of Harinath, and he also first saw Sri Ramakrishna on the same occasion. He was fourteen years of age and reading in the second class. Like Hari he used to practise religious exercises regularly from his boyhood. He bathed thrice daily, cooked his own meals and read the Gita and the religious books. One day he went off with a Sadhu, telling none about it. He had the idea of making pilgrimages to holy places, but the thought of his parents made him return after a month. But he did not resume his studies. Harinath, meanwhile, had been visiting Sri Ramakrishna. One day, in 1884, Gangadhar accompained him to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna spoke affably with him, as if he had been an old acquaintance, and among other things asked him about his journey with the Sadhu and also if he had seen him before.

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[1] By 'here' he means himself.

Thenceforth Gangadhar began to frequent Dakshineswar. He was very orthodox in his habits, and fearing lest Sri Ramakrishna should ask him to take the rice Prasad in the temple, he always went in the evening, when he took only fruits and sweets. Sri Ramakrishna noticed this. Once Gangadhar happened to be there in the day-time and was arranging to cook his meal, when the Master said to him, "The food offered to Kali is cooked in Ganges water and is very pure; it is better even than Havishya.[1] You take that." Gangadhar could not refuse. On his way he looked back and saw Sri Ramakrishna watching him, probably to see that he went to the right place. He took everything but fish and meat. Then he went to Sri Ramakrishna's room and found the Master standing with betel ready for him. As he was not used to chewing it, he refused it. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Why don't you take it? What harm is there in it? Narendra chews it a hundred times a day, and eats fish and flesh, just as they come. Yet his mind is always on the heights—he sees the Brahman in everything! You are a boy. You needn't bother about giving up fish or betel, and living on Havishya cooked with your own hands. Just associate with Narendra."

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[1] Rice and vegetables boiled together, without seasoning, considered a very pure food.

Accordingly, one day Gangadhar went to Narendra's house to see him. He was so impressed with Narendra's appearance, conversation, and frank behaviour, that he became very much attached to him. Narendra loved him much and used to call him "Ganges". But Gangadhar kept his orthodoxy intact. And he could not understand why in the face of the verdict of the scriptures, Sri Ramakrishna should try to make him disregard it. Did he not believe in being orthodox? A few days after this, Gangadhar went to Dakshineswar and found the Master talking to a group of people. One of them complained to him, "Sir, young boys come to you, and you teach them renunciation—you encourage them to give up the world and become Sadhus. Is that fair?" The Master replied, "The boys who come here are very pure and are inclined towards God from an early age. Some of them bathe thrice daily, eat Havishya cooked with their own hands, are devoted to the study of the scriptures, and so on. Little boys—who should be hankering after life—hunger for renunciation instead! Can this be achieved in a single birth? How many austerities and spiritual practices they must have gone through in previous lives to possess this devotional turn of mind from boyhood! If I don't talk of religion to them, to whom else shall I talk?" Gangadhar was cheered at these words, and his doubt was dispelled.

He visited Sri Ramakrishna now and then and served him occasionally during his last days at Cossipore. Even there he maintained his orthodox habits and cooked his own food. His association with the Master strengthened his spirit of renunciation, which afterwards took a tangible shape.

Sâradâ Prasanna Mitra came of a rich zemindar family of Barasat, 24-Parganas. From his very childhood he was a great devotee and fond of worship. He came to sit at the feet of the Master when he was in his teens. To the illuminated vision of Sri Ramakrishna the contents of his mind were revealed in every detail. All weaknesses were at once apparent and soon he applied the specific remedy for them.

In the home of Sarada there had always been servants who did all the menial tasks and other work of the household. Unconsciously or otherwise as a result of this early training, Sarada had held himself above menial tasks and brought this defect with him to Sri Ramakrishna. One unusually hot day, while visiting the temple at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Please bring some water and wash my feet." Sarada stood stockstill, rooted to the ground, a deepening flush rising to his forehead. Had he heard aright, were there not servants for such things? Seemingly not noticing his confusion, the Master repeated the request; and notwithstanding the presence of friends and others, there was nothing to do but to comply. With this single act, through the Master's grace, the pride of birth was for ever broken, and the true spirit of selfless service, which was really one of his innate qualities, was from that time on placed at the disposal of his Master and all humanity.

Of his many wonderful experiences while living with the Master, one stands out in marked relief. One of the last vestiges of the ego to be removed is sex, with all its subtle ramifications, and years of practice and asceticism are often necessary for its eradication. Sarada had set his will to conquer this great foe, but the task seemed endless until, on a certain day, as he sat in meditation, he felt a definite motion of the Master's grace within and the idea of sex began to disappear like a mirage, never to return.

Tulasi Charan Datta was a boy of eighteen who lived in the Bosepara quarter of Calcutta. Late one afternoon he was chatting near his house with some friends, when he suddenly heard that a Paramahamsa was visiting the house of Balaram Babu. Many people were going to see him; Tulasi decided to go also to see what kind of a Paramahamsa he was. When he reached Balaram's house, he found that the parlour and verandah were packed with visitors. Peeping in he saw in the centre of the room a vacant seat with a pillow. He went to the western verandah and waited. A few minutes after, he saw a man completely absorbed in himself, come staggering like one drunk, from the house. He came to where the boy stood, looked at him for a moment, and slowly tottered into the parlour. Tulasi stood nonplussed, forgetting even to salute the Master—for it was he. He felt a sort of creeping sensation within his bosom, and his whole body seemed to be paralysed. When this feeling subsided, he ran home.

A few days after the above incident, Tulasi went to see his friend Harinath. The latter proposed to go to Dakshineswar and see the Paramahamsa. When they reached there, they found that the Master had gone to Calcutta. So they missed him. They went into his room, and Tulasi began to look at the pictures hanging from the wall. Among these was a photograph of the Master. When Tulasi saw it he was startled. He said at once, "I have seen him already." "Where?" asked Harinath. "At the house of Balaram Babu," replied Tulasi. "Then it is all right," said Hari.

Shortly after this Tulasi went to Dakshineswar alone. He sought Sri Ramakrishna and found him at his noon meal. He saluted and sat on the floor. This was the first time he had ever bowed down to the

Master. It did not occur to him that he must not salute a man engaged in eating, or that his presence might be an intrusion. But Ramakrishna did not mind these breaches of etiquette. After finishing his meal he began to talk to the boy. They were alone. Only the Holy Mother was in the screened verandah to the north. After a few preliminary personal questions, Sri Ramakrishna surprised the boy by suddenly saying, "The other day a boy resembling you came here and asked me if I could act as his intermediary." Tulasi did not understand; so he remained silent. Sri Ramakrishna continued, "By the word intermediary I mean one who brings about the meeting of an individual with his Beloved Lord. He is the Guru, and he is all. There is no difference between him and God." Tulasi understood that the Master wished to be regarded in that light by him. After a while Sri Ramakrishna placed his left hand on the boy's shoulder as a mark of favour and slowly walked towards the Panchavati. Tulasi's heart was filled with joy when he was asked to come frequently. After reaching the Panchavati, Sri Ramakrishna saluted the spot where he had practised his Sadhanas and sat on a lower step. Then in an exalted mood he began to talk to the Mother. Tulasi could catch only the word "Mother" now and then. After a while the Master returned to his room, and Tulasi took leave of him for the day. After the passing of the Master, he renounced the world.

Hariprasanna Chatterjee of Belgharia was introduced to Sri Ramakrishna in 1883 while he was in college by his friends Shashi and Sharat. The Master took an active interest in the boy, who visited him a number of times. Then he ceased coming. Noticing his absence the Master sent an invitation to him through Sharat to come. Sharat delivered the message, but Hariprasanna was unable to accept it. Later the Master said to Sharat, "Well, Mother says he will not come now." Sharat did not believe him, and continued in his efforts to bring Hariprasanna to Dakshineswar. But something or other happened to prevent it.

Among other things the Master gave Hariprasanna the following drastic advice: "Even if a woman is like pure gold and rolls on the ground through love of God, it is dangerous to look at her." He asked him if he would be willing to beg his food from door to door. The boy said he would. The Master evidently had a glimpse of this young aspirant's future life, and tried to instil into his mind a love for renunciation. Hariprasanna became a monk some years later.

KALI AND SUBODH

Kâli Prasâd Chandra first came to see Sri Ramakrishna about the end of the year 1883. His father was a teacher in a Calcutta school. Kali was of a religious nature even in early boyhood and used to read the Bhagavad Gita and other sacred books. At the proper age he was sent to school, where Baburam was his class-mate. At school he excelled in drawing. One day his teacher praised his skill and prophesied a bright future for him. "But, sir," said the boy, "I don't wish to excel in this art." "Why not ?" asked the teacher. He said in reply, "The painter paints only the surface of things, but the philosopher goes beyond the surface to the cause of things. I will be a philosopher and not a painter."

To quench his thirst for the knowledge of the Hindu Shastras, Kali studied day and night. Nothing attracted him so much as the study of Yoga. One day, he read that no one could be Yogi without a Guru. This made him eager to find a true spiritual teacher. A class-mate with whom he discussed the matter, told him of Sri Ramakrishna whom he called a Paramasamsa or perfected sage. Some time after, Kali resolved to go to see Sri Ramakrishna. He started for Dakshineswar, but not knowing the way, went astray, and it was noon when tired and hungry he reached his destination. His disappointment knew no bounds when he found that Sri Ramakrishna had gone to Calcutta. He sat down, not knowing what to do. He had no money for food or to return to Calcutta. Fortunately a boy of his age accosted him and asked him what he wanted. It was Shashi. Kali told his story and expressed his desire to return to Calcutta. Shashi induced him to stay and made him comfortable.

The two boys spent the afternoon and evening together. At night Shashi informed Kali that the Master had returned. Kali waited eagerly. In a few minutes he heard footsteps at the door and the name of the goddess Kali uttered feelingly thrice. He was profoundly impressed. Sri Ramakrishna entered the room. When the Master heard that Kali was there, he asked to see him. Kali entered the room trembling with awe. To his great surprise he saw, instead of an ascetic with matted locks and emaciated form, a plain man of middle age, with a smiling countenance. Sri Ramakrishna asked him a few questions and told him that he would see him the next morning. Kali spent the night in the verandah and called on the Master in the morning. The Master talked with him for a while and asked him in passing if he had married. Kali replied in the negative, but said that his parents were urging him to do so. The Master next took him to the northern verandah and made him sit on a wooden bedstead. He then touched the boy, who immediately felt that some power had been transmitted to him. Then he was told to go to the Kali temple and meditate for a while, Sri Ramakrishna directing him what to do. When Kali took his leave, the Master affectionately asked him to come again.

Sri Ramakrishna said many things about Kali. One day he remarked that his eyebrows reminded him of Sri Krishna's. On another occasion he said that the boy had something of the personality of Krishna. When Kali told him of his great interest in Yoga philosophy, he said, "You were a Yogi in your past life. That is why you were inclined to Yoga so young."

From the very beginning Kali attracted the notice of the Master by his neatness and orderliness. The Master always praised his methodical habits.

Kali began to practise religious discipline under the guidance of Sri Ramakrishna, and through his grace was blessed with many wonderful visions. One day in a vision he saw Sri Ramakrishna in company with other past Incarnations of the Lord. These divine personages entered one by one into Sri Ramakrishna's body and came out again. This convinced Kali that Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of all previous Incarnations. Kali possessed a mind which responded easily to any religious stimulus. He always saw visions of gods and goddesses during meditation. One day he saw them all merging in the body of one luminous being. He narrated this experience to Sri Ramakrishna, who said, "Ah, you have seen the Vaikuntha! Henceforth you will no longer have these visions. You have risen above that stage." This proved to be true. Thereafter Kali in his meditations would be occupied with the ideas of infinity and vastness, etc., associated with the Impersonal Brahman, instead of the familiar forms of deities.

Kali belonged to the inner circle of Sri Ramakrishna's young devotees. He visited the Master every now and then and sometimes passed a day or two with him. He was an expert angler and often fished in the temple-garden ponds. One day he caught three or four fish. The Master learning of it asked him why he was so cruel. Kali replied promptly, "Why, sir, I have done nothing wrong. We are all Atman, and the Atman is immortal. Therefore I have not really killed the fish." "My dear boy," said the Master, "you are mistaken. A man of realisation can never be cruel to others. It is against his very nature.

Such a man cannot make a false step—his mind never thinks in a wrong way. Reflect upon this."[1] Kali left the place silently. He pondered over the words for three days and at last realised their truth.

Subodh was a High School boy of seventeen belonging to the family of Shankar Ghosh, the founder of the Kali temple at Thanthania, Calcutta. He, however, cared more for spiritual things than academical ones. One day his father gave him "The Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna". Subodh was so deeply impressed by it that a great desire arose in his mind to meet the Master. When he told his father of this desire, he was promised a trip to Dakshineswar later with the rest of the family. But Subodh would not wait. In a few days, with a friend, Kshirode, he started for Dakshineswar. This was some time in 1885.

Subodh had an idea that a Paramahamsa was some sort of a magician. He had never before spoken to a Sadhu; so he said to his friend, "You must go forward and talk with the holy man. I don't know the proper etiquette." The friend agreed. They entered the Master's room and saluted him with folded hands. "Where do you come from?" asked Sri Ramakrishna. "From Calcutta," was the reply. Pointing to Subodh he said, "Why is he standing so far off? Come nearer." Thus encouraged, Subodh went closer. "Do you not belong to the family of Shankar Ghosh?" asked Sri Ramakrishna. Subodh was surprised and said, "Yes, sir, but how did you know of it?" "When I was staying at Jhamapukur," said Sri Ramakrishna, "I often visited your home as well as your Kali temple at Thanthania. That was before your birth. I knew you would come. Well, Mother sends here those who will attain spirituality. Why do you stand so far off? Come closer." Subodh approached the Master, who grasped his hand and closed his eyes for a few minutes. At last he said, "You will attain the goal. Mother says so."

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[1] Compare this with the lesson Sri Ramakrishna gave Balaram anent killing. It gives us an idea as to how individual was his teaching.

The Master asked for a mat for Subodh and his friend and then asked them how they had come to Dakshineswar. Subodh, who because of the Master's kindness had lost his shyness, said, "Why, on foot." "Indeed!" exclaimed the Master, "but how did you know about me?" "I liked your sayings so much," said Subodh, "you are such a great man, and so famous! Therefore we have come to see you." These words brought a sudden change in the Master's expression. With a humility that amazed the boys he said, "Ah, I am worse than a worm. Name and fame! Ridiculous! Really I am more insignificant than a worm." After a little he said to Subodh, "Mother sends here those who will receive Her grace. Come here on Tuesdays or Saturdays. Many people from your part of town come here those days. Come with them." Subodh said, "No, sir, that will not do, for my relatives will find out that I am coming here. Please tell me what you have got to say now." "I cannot recall my words, my child," said the Master: "If I say I shall go to a certain place on such and such a day, I must do so at any cost. Even if I don't like it, Mother drags me there. I have said those words; so do come on Tuesdays or Saturdays." Subodh agreed, and finding it was getting late, asked leave to go home. Sri Ramakrishna treated the boys to some sweets and affectionately pressed them to accept carriage or boat hire. But they declined and returned to Calcutta on foot.

On the following Saturday, Subodh stole away from school, and with his friend hurried to Dakshineswar. The Master's room was crowded with visitors. Peeping through the door the boys saluted Sri Ramakrishna, who when he caught sight of them raised his hand as a signal for them to stay outside. The Master asked the audience to wait and went out to greet them.

It was about 3 P.M. Sri Ramakrishna asked Rakhal to bring some Ganges water, with which he washed his hands. He then squatted on the staircase leading to the Shiva temples to the south of his room and bade the boys sit down also. He asked Kshirode to show his tongue. On it he wrote something with his finger and stroked his body from the naval to the throat. He did the same to Subodh, saying, "Awake, Mother, awake!" Then he told both to meditate.

The magic touch awakened Subodh's latent spirituality. No sooner had he commenced to meditate than his whole body trembled, and he felt a current rushing along the spinal column to his brain. An ineffable joy overwhelmed him, and he saw a strange light within him, in which the forms of numerous gods and goddesses flashed. The meditation deepened, and the boy lost all sense of personal identity. When he regained consciousness he found the Master stroking his body in the reverse order, from the head downwards. "Well," said he, "have you practised meditation at home?" "Very little, sir," replied the boy, "I used to think a little of gods and goddesses as I heard of them from my mother." "Ah," said the Master, "that's why you could concentrate so easily." Then he asked Kshirode if he had seen or felt anything. The boy replying in the negative, he said, "All right, you will do so later on."

Sri Ramakrishna then told them to go to the

Panchavati and meditate, while he returned to his room. When they went to take leave of him they were given some sweets, and also pressed to take carriage-hire, which was declined. Sri Ramakrishna said to Subodh, "There is a teacher who lives near you, named Mahendra. He often comes here and is a good man. Go to see him now and then and come here also." Subodh made no reply, as he was not certain if he would be able to do so.

After meeting Sri Ramakrishna Subodh often saw a light between his eyebrows. When he told his mother she said, "You are fortunate, but don't divulge it to others. You will be a loser if you do so." "What harm can it do to me, mother?" said the boy. "I do not want this light but That from which it comes."

Subodh lost all relish for study. He liked to be with Sri Ramakrishna always and to spend the time in meditation, prayer, or repeating the name of God. At a hint from the Master, Mahendra often invited Subodh to see him. But the boy did not go, thinking it idle to expect spiritual instruction from a householder. The next time he went to Dakshineswar, the Master introduced him to Shashi and Sharat and also told him to go to see Naren. Asked why he did not call on Mahendra, Subodh said, "Sir, he lives with his wife and children. What have I to do with him?" Sri Ramakrishna laughed at these words so indicative of renunciation and said, "He will talk only of me. Don't hesitate to go to him." Subodh agreed. A few days later he went to Mahendra and was cordially received. When asked his reason for not coming before, Subodh said frankly, "I did not like to come because you are a householder. But the Master has told me that you will speak to me of him only. Therefore I have come." "It's quite true," said Mahendra, "I am an insignificant person. But I live by the side of an ocean, and I keep with me a few pitchers of sea water. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak of but his words?" After some pleasant hours the boy took his leave. Thus did Sri Ramakrishna seal the bond of friendship and love among his disciples.

MEETING WITH PUNDIT SHASHADHAR TARKACHUDAMANI

On June 25th, the Master came with Hazra to the house of his devotee Ishân in Calcutta and spent the morning there, with Narendra and Rakhal. In the afternoon he went to visit Pundit Shashadhar Tarkachudâmani, at the house of one of the Pundit's admirers in College Street. The Pundit was a Hindu preacher of great eloquence and erudition whose "scientific" interpretation of the Hindu religion was widely known. On his way there the Master plunged into Bhava-Samadhi. He was cordially received, and the Pundit saluted him with great humility and reverence. The Master took his seat, as did the devotees. Then he said to the Pundit, "Well, what do you lecture about?"

Shashadhar: "Sir, I try to expound the scriptures."

Sri Ramakrishna: "In this Kali Yuga, devotion as taught by Nârada is the best. There is hardly time to go through all the rituals enjoined in the Shastras. Nowadays for fever you must prescribe a fever mixture, not the old indigenous remedies. While you are waiting for the old methods to work, the patient expires. So if you teach people rituals, you must tell them to adopt only as much of them as suits their requirements.

"Your lectures are having very little influence on worldly-minded people. You will soon find this out. The new-born calf cannot stand on its legs. You are unable to distinguish between a devotee and a man of the world. But that is not your fault. In a storm it is difficult to distinguish one kind of tree from another. Prior to realisation none can give up rituals altogether.

The flower drops off as soon as there is fruit. Devotion is the fruit, and rituals are the flower. The Sandhyâ merges in the Gayatri, the Gayatri in Om, and Om in Samadhi—like the chime of a bell gradually fading away."

In alluding to Samadhi, the Master fell into that state. As consciousness returned, he said addressing the Mother, "Mother, the other day Thou didst show me Vidyasagar. I wanted to see another scholar, and Thou hast brought me here." Turning to Shashadhar he said, "My boy, do try to become stronger. Practise a little more. You have taken the role of a teacher too soon. But your intention is good. You want to help others. When I first heard of you," he continued bowing to the Pundit, "I inquired if you were a mere man of learning or one of discrimination and renunciation. A scholar without discrimination is a nonentity. There is no harm in playing the teacher's role if one has the authority from God. Such a one is invincible. One ray of light from the goddess of learning is sufficient to dim the brightest intellects. Moths come of themselves to a lighted lamp. They come in thousands —no one has to call them. Similarly, the man who has received the divine command need not issue invitations to his lectures. The magnet does not invite a piece of iron to come. It attracts automatically. Therefore I ask you if you have the command."

Hazra: "He must have had it. Isn't it so, Punditji?"

The Pundit: "No, sir, I cannot boast of any such command."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Of what value are the lectures of one who has not received the Lord's authority?"

He exhorted the Pundit to dive deep into devotion. He said, "Infinite are the ways leading to the ocean of immortality. You have to plunge in somehow. Suppose there is a pool of nectar, and you will become immortal if you sip a few drops. Of your own accord you may jump into the pool, or descend the steps and leisurely sip the nectar, or someone may push you in—the result is the same. You will be immortal if you but taste the nectar. There are infinite paths. You may follow any of these—knowledge, devotion, or work. If you are sincere, you will realise Him.

"If you realise the Mother of the universe, you will get knowledge as well as devotion."

The Pundit asked how far he had travelled on pilgrimage.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I have visited some holy places. (Smiling) Hazra went very far, and climbed high up. He went to Hrishikesh. I neither went so far nor climbed so high. Kites and vultures also soar very high, but they are always searching for carrion down below. Lust and wealth are this carrion. If you can attain to devotion sitting here, what's the use of going to holy places?

"And know one thing. However much you may instruct a man, there will be no effect until the right moment comes. The child, when it went to bed, said to its mother, 'Wake me up, mother, when I am hungry.' The mother replied, 'Don't be afraid, my child, your hunger will wake you up.' Similarly, intense yearning for God comes only at the right moment.

"There are three classes of doctors. There are those who feel the pulse of the patient, prescribe medicine, and go away after telling him to take it. They form the lowest class. Similarly, there are some teachers who instruct a disciple, but do not care to see if those instructions are carried out. There is another class of doctors who prescribe medicine for the patient and ask him to take it. If he is unwilling, they reason with him. This is the second class. Likewise there are second class teachers, who instruct the disciple and exhort him to act up to their advice. Lastly, there is the highest class of doctors who, finding that the patient does not heed gentle persuasion, use force to make him swallow the medicine. Similarly, there are the highest teachers, who even use force to put their disciples on the path of righteousness."

The Pundit: "Sir, if there are first class teachers, why then did you say that there would be no effect till the right moment?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "But suppose the medicine does not get into the stomach but trickles out of the mouth; what will the doctor do in such a case? Even a first class doctor is powerless there.

"You must suit the instruction to the requirements of the disciple. This you do not do. If a boy comes to me, I first ask him about his relatives. Suppose he has no father, or is burdened with his father's debt; how can he devote his mind to God? Are you listening?"

The Pundit: "Yes, sir, I am all attention."

Sri Ramakrishna: "One day there came to the Dakshineswar temple a number of Sikh soldiers. I met them before the Kali temple. One of them said, 'God is merciful.' I said, 'Indeed! How do you know that?' They said, 'Why sir, He feeds us and takes such care of us.' I said, 'Is it a thing to wonder at? Isn't He the father of us all? If a father does not look after his children, who else will? Will strangers do it?' "

Narendra: "Shouldn't we then call Him merciful?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Certainly you may. What I mean is that God is our most intimate relation, not a stranger."

The Pundit: "What priceless words!"

The Master was thirsty. A glass of water was brought, which, however, he would not take. He asked for another one. It was learnt later that an impure man had touched the first glass.

Sri Ramakrishna, wishing to take leave, said by way of a compliment to Shashadhar, "It is a great day for me—today I have seen the new crescent. I have used the phrase purposely. Sita said to Ravana, 'You are the full moon, and my Ramachandra is the new cresent.' Ravana could not read between the lines, so he was very glad. Sita only meant that Ravana had reached the zenith of his power; like the full moon he had to wane. Whereas Ramachandra was the new crescent—he would flourish day by day."

On June 30th the Pundit with his elder brother visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. The Master was often nervous as a child when a celebrated person came to see him. On occasions like these he was conscious of his illiteracy as well as fearful of the trances in which he lost control of his body. He asked some of the devotees to be present during the interview, so that they might engage the Pundit in conversation as well as take care of him (the Master). But as was his wont, he forgot all these when Shashadhar came. He gazed at the Pundit for a while and fell into a semi-conscious state.

"You are a scholar," he said, "tell me something." Shashadhar replied humbly, "My heart is dried up with too much philosophy. I have come to you for a little devotion. Please let me hear from you." Sri Ramakrishna said, "Ah, what shall I say? None can describe the true nature of Brahman. It first manifested Itself as a twin principle—half man and half woman—just to show that It was both Purusha and Prakriti. Descending a step lower, It separated into Purusha and Prakriti as distinct entities." He became animated as he spoke, sang song after song about the Divine Mother, and took the Pundit by storm. Gradually his emotions abated, and he exhorted Shashadhar to practise devotion with intense longing and prayer. He said, "Hearing is better than reading. One understands the truth better by hearing it from the lips of the Guru or a real monk. One does not have to pay attention to the unimportant details in the scriptures. Seeing, again, is better than hearing. I mean actual realisation. It dispels all doubt. The Shastras teach a good many things. But unless one realises God, unless one has devotion to His lotus feet, unless one's mind is purified, everything is useless. The Bengali almanac makes a forecast of the annual rainfall, but if you squeeze the book, not a drop of water do you get."

The next day the Master thus told of his interview with the Pundit to a devotee: "Not entirely rid of my nervousness, I kept looking at him and listening to his words. Suddenly the Mother revealed Shashadhar's inner self to me. I saw that scriptural erudition was of no avail without discrimination and renunciation. Then I felt a current rush towards my head, and the last trace of fear vanished from my mind. I was swept from my moorings and was dead to the outside world. Out of this mouth came an incessant torrent of words. The more I talked the more I felt that a fresh supply was coming from behind as at Kamarpukur when a man measures grains, a fresh supply is pushed forward. I was entirely unconscious of what I said. When I regained a little consciousness, I found the Pundit in tears, completely overpowered. Occasionally I have this experience."

Three days later the Pundit visited him again at Balaram Bose's house. The Master said, "There are two tests of knowledge. One is a quiet nature, and the other an absence of egoism. You have both."

The Pundit: "What sort of devotion is necessary to attain the Lord?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Devotion is of three kinds according to temperament. It has a Sâttvika, a Râjasika, and a Tâmasika aspect.

"The Sattvika aspect of devotion the Lord alone knows. Such a devotee loves secrecy. Perhaps he meditates within a mosquito-curtain, so that nobody may know of it. As the crimson glow of dawn heralds the rising sun, so a man with perfect Sattva is close to realisation.

"He who has the Rajasika aspect of devotion loves display—wants to make his devotion known. He worships in a royal style, goes to his worship-room dressed in silk, and puts on a necklace of Rudraksha, set with pearl or gold beads.

"The Tamasika aspect of devotion is like a band of dacoits raiding a house. They may attack with a husking machine to act as a battering ram, and defy even a posse of eight Sub-Inspectors of Police. 'Kill and plunder' is their battle-cry. A devotee of this type madly shouts, 'Hara, Hara, Hara, Vyom, Vyom! Victory to Kali!' He has a wonderful strength of mind and a blazing faith!

"The followers of Shakti have faith like that. They say, 'Once I have taken the name of Kali, or Durga, or Rama, what sin can I commit?'

"The Vaishnavas have very negative ideas—they are ever crouching and belittling themselves. They are constantly engaged in telling beads (turning to Balaram's father, who was present) and go about petitioning God, 'O Krishna, have pity on me—I am a despicable creature, a sinner.'

"One must have the tremendous faith that the utterance of His name burns away all sins. How absurd to repeat the Lord's name day and night, and talk of sin in the same breath!"

Fired with enthusiasm Sri Ramakrishna sang: 'Mother, if I die with Thy name on my lips, Thou canst not cast me away in my hour of peril!"

The Pundit was weeping. Sri Ramakrishna's words, coupled with his life of blazing renunciation, touched a tender chord in his heart. It was Car-Festival day. There were songs and dances, in which Sri Ramakrishna joined. At the end of the programme the Master said: "This kind of thing represents the joy of spiritual practice. The joy of worldly-minded people is derived from sense-objects, from the enjoyment of lust and wealth. When in the course of spiritual practice the Lord is pleased to manifest Himself, then comes the highest enjoyment—the bliss of Brahman."

The Pundit (humbly): "What sort of yearning is needed to bring about this happy state of the mind?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "This yearning comes when the heart struggles sincerely for realisation. The teacher said to the disciple, 'Come, I shall show you what intensity of yearning one must have to realise God.' He took the disciple to a pond and pushed him under the water. Raising him up after a while, he asked the disciple how he had felt. The disciple replied, 'Why, I was gasping for breath!'"

The Pundit: "It is quite clear now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Love for God is the chief thing. We need devotion."

MEETING WITH BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJEE

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the great Bengali novelist, met Sri Ramakrishna once only, in the house of Adhar Chandra Sen, in December, 1884. Adhar had invited several of his brother officers, of whom Bankim was one, to meet the Master. Adhar introduced Bankim thus: "Sir, he is a great scholar and has written many books. He has come to see you. His name is Bankim Babu."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Ah, Bankim![1] Well, whose influence has bent you?"

Bankim (smiling): "Ah, sir, the kick of British boots."

Sri Ramakrishna: "No, no, I don't mean that. Some say Sri Krishna was bent through love—love of Sri Radha. It made his body pliant and gave him his characteristic pose. Do you know why he looks so dark and small—like a man? So long as God is at a distance, He looks dark, as the water of the ocean appears blue from a distance. But it is no longer so when you go near or take some of it in your hand. Then it is transparent. The sun appears very small because it is so far off; close by it would be immense. God is neither dark nor small, if one knows His real nature. But it is a thing far, far off—one cannot realise it except in Samadhi. As long as there is the distinction of 'I' and 'thou', name and form must remain. It is all His play. As long as we are obsessed with the idea of separateness, God reveals Himself in forms.

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[1] "Bankim" literally means bent.

"Sri Krishna is the Purusha—the Male Principle, and Radha is his Shakti—the Primordial Power. What is the significance of the united forms of Krishna and Radha? It means that Purusha and Prakriti are identical—there is no difference between them. Purusha cannot exist without Prakriti, nor can Prakriti exist without Purusha. One implies the other. Therefore you find in the united forms of Krishna and Radha that their eyes are riveted on each other. Radha's complexion is bright like lightning; and Krishna's cloth is yellow. Sri Krishna's complexion is blue as a cloud; Radha's robe is blue, and she wears a sapphire. She has ringing anklets, and Krishna wears the same. That is to say, the union between Purusha and Prakriti is both internal and external."

When Sri Ramakrishna finished, Bankim began to talk in English with Adhar and his friends.

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Well, what are you saying?"

Adhar: "Sir, we are discussing what you said just now."

Sri Ramakrishna: "I am put in mind of an amusing story. A barber was shaving a gentleman. His client said, 'Damn!' when the barber cut him. The barber didn't know the meaning of the word. He put his razor down, rolled up his sleeves—it was winter—and demanded in an angry tone what it meant. The gentleman said, 'Don't worry. Go on with your work. It doesn't mean anything. Only I want you to shave a bit more carefully.' But the barber wouldn't let him off so easily. He said, 'If the word means something good, I take it for myself, my father, and my whole ancestry; if it has a bad meaning, may it—with all its reduplications—go to you, your father, and your whole ancestry!' "

There was loud laughter over this. Then Bankim said to the Master, "Sir, why do you not preach?"

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "You talk of preaching! Preaching springs from egotism. Man is but a puny creature. Preaching is reserved for God who has created the sun and moon and brought this universe into being. Is it easy to preach? One cannot do so unless God reveals Himself and gives the commission. But you can have a travesty of this. You can preach without that commission;—people will listen for a few days, but they will forget everything you have said. It will be an excitement like any other. They may say, 'Ah, how well he speaks!' But when you stop, you will find that no impression has been made.

"So long as there is fire under the pot of milk, the milk will hiss and swell. But as soon as you remove the fire, the milk sinks to its former level.

"First of all one must develop one's powers by spiritual practice. Otherwise it is like inviting a friend to share one's bed when it is hardly large enough for oneself."

Everyone listened with attention.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Bankim): "You are a great scholar and have written many books. What do you think is the duty of man? What will he take with him after death? Of course you believe in a future life!"

Bankim: "Future life! What's that?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "After realisation there is no more going to other planes, there is no more rebirth. But until one attains knowledge, realises God, one must return again and again to this world. There is no escape. For such a one there is the next world. Of course when a man attains knowledge, realises God, he is liberated and has no more to return. Boiled paddy, if sown, does not sprout. A man who is boiled, that is, perfected,[1] on the fire of knowledge no longer participates in the play of creation. It is impossible for him to be of this world, for he is not attached to lust and wealth. What is the good of sowing boiled paddy?"

Bankim (smiling): "Sir, there are also many worthless plants which do not yield any fruit."

Sri Ramakrishna: "But a Jnani should not be compared to these. One who has realised God has acquired not fruits like the gourd or pumpkin, but the fruit of immortality. He is never born again. He has to go nowhere, neither to this world, nor to the solar sphere nor to the lunar.

"All analogies are based on partial resemblance. You are a scholar, and you have studied logic. The expression, 'terrible as a tiger', does not mean that the object of comparison is an actual tiger. (Laughter).

"I said the same thing to Keshab. He asked me if there was a future life. I replied indirectly by saying, 'You have seen the potter drying his pots in the sun. Some are baked, others are unbaked. Sometimes cattle trample and break them. The baked ones are thrown away as useless. But the unbaked shards are collected, pounded with a little water and put on the wheel again to make new pots.' Then I added, 'So long as you are unbaked, the Potter will not let you go. Until you have attained knowledge—realised God—He will put you on the wheel again. That is to say, you have to be born again and again, and there is no escape. When you realise God, you are free, and the

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[1] Here there is a play on the word "Siddha" which has both these meanings.

Potter throws you away, for you are no longer of any use in this creation of Maya. A Jnani has transcended Maya. What has he to do with it?'

"But He keeps some in this world of Maya, to teach mankind. A Jnani lives in the world, taking on the higher aspect of Maya in order to teach men. It is God who keeps him there to do His work. Shukadeva and Shankaracharya are cases in point.

(To Bankim) "What is your idea about the duties of man?"

Bankim (smiling): "I should say, eating, sleeping, and enjoying the flesh."

Sri Ramakrishna (in disgust): "Pshaw, you are very saucy. You only talk of what you do always. Eructations often smell of what one eats—radish or green cocoanut for instance. You run constantly after lust and wealth, so only words about them come from your lips. Dwelling constantly on sense-objects makes one calculating—insincere. But meditation on God makes one straightforward.

"What will mere scholarship avail without meditation, discrimination, and renunciation? A scholar who has studied much may be able to quote verses glibly or to write books, but if he is attached to lust and considers wealth and fame to be the essence of life, he is nothing. He is no scholar whose mind is not turned to God.

"Some think, 'These people are constantly busy with God, they are mad, they have lost their heads! But how clever we are! How we enjoy wealth, fame, and sense-pleasures!' Well, the crow also thinks it is very clever, but from early morning it is looking for filth. Look how restless it is, moving constantly!"

There was dead silence. Sri Ramakrishna continued: "Those who meditate on God, who pray day and night to be relieved of the craving for lust and wealth, to whom sense-pleasures taste bitter, and who can relish nothing but the bliss of the lotus feet of God —are of the nature of swans. If you place a mixture of milk and water before them, they will drink the milk only—the water they leave. You must also have noticed their gait. They walk straight ahead. So with real devotees—they march towards God alone. They want nothing else; they have no relish for anything else. (To Bankim) Please don't take offence at my words."

Bankim: "Sir, I am not for soft words alone."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Lust and wealth constitute the world. They are Maya. They prevent us from seeing or thinking of God. After the birth of one or two children, one should live with one's wife as with a sister, and talk of God alone. Then both will be drawn to God, and the wife will become a help in the path of spirituality. Without giving up the animal instinct none can taste divine bliss. One should sincerely pray to God to be freed from it. Next is wealth. I used to sit on the bank of the Ganges below the Panchavati and assert that money was earth and earth money. Then I threw both into the Ganges."

Bankim: "Indeed! Is money the same thing as earth? Even with four pice one can help a poor person. If money is no better than earth, do you mean to say that charity and philanthropy are nothing?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Charity! Philanthropy! Dare you say that you have the power to do good to others? Well, man is so given to boasting, but if, when he is asleep, one pours ditch water into his mouth, he does not know it. Where then would his boasting be?

"A Sannyasin must give up lust and wealth for ever. What has once been spat out is spat out for good. When a Sannyasin gives to another, he knows that he himself is not doing it. To God alone belongs the right to practise charity, and no man can claim it. Charity and everything depends on His will. A true Sannyasin renounces both mentally and physically. He who does not eat molasses must not keep it about. If he does and advises others not to eat it, he will not be listened to.

"A householder, of course, requires money; for he has wife and children. To maintain them, he must save. Two classes of beings never provide for the future—the monk and the bird. And yet the bird, when it has young ones to feed, must lay up stores.

"A genuine devotee, though he be in the world, performs his duties without attachment. He surrenders to God the fruits of his work—gain or loss, weal or woe, everything. Day and night he prays to God for devotion and only that. This is called work without motive. A Sannyasin also must work in the same spirit; but he has not as many duties as the householder.

"If a householder gives in charity with a spirit of non-attachment, he does it for his *own* good and not for the good of others. He thereby serves God who resides in all beings, and service unto God means helping one's own self. If one serves God manifested through all beings—not only through men, but through birds and beasts also—without caring for name and fame, or for a heaven after death, expecting no return from those whom he serves, he really works without motive, and it benefits him alone. This is Karma-Yoga, one of the ways to realise God. But it is very difficult.

"Hence I say, one who does this kind of work unattached—who is kind and charitable—benefits only himself. It is God who helps others. The love that you see in parents is His love: He has given it to them for the preservation of His creatures. The compassion which you notice in the generous is His compassion: He has put it there to save the helpless. Whether you are charitable or not, He has His work done some way or other. His work never stops.

"So the duty of man is to take refuge in Him and pray to Him eagerly for realisation. One who has realised God craves nothing else. One who has tasted the syrup of candy cannot relish treacle.

"Those who want to build hospitals and dispensaries and are satisfied with that, are also good people, but they are of a different grade. The real devotee seeks nothing but God. If he has too much work to do, he prays earnestly to God, 'Lord, be gracious unto me and lessen my work. Otherwise my mind, which should exclusively think of Thee, becomes scattered—it thinks of sense-objects.' Genuine devotees form a class by themselves. Pure devotion is impossible without the conviction that God alone is real and all else unreal—that the world is transient, while its Creator alone is real and eternal.

"Some people think that God cannot be realised without the help of books and scriptures, that one should first of all learn of this world and its inhabitants, that one should study science. They hold that one cannot realise God without understanding His creation. What is your opinion? Which comes first, science or God?"

Bankim: "One should first of all know something about the world. How can one know of God without some such knowledge? One should first learn from books."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That's the one cry of all of you! God is first, and then His creation. After realising Him, you can know everything else, if it be necessary.

"First realise God, then think of creation or other things. Vâlmiki was given the name of Rama to repeat as Mantra, but he was told to repeat it in the inverse way—as Marâ. The first syllable means God, and the last, the world. First God, and then the world. If you know one, you know all. If you put fifty zeroes after one, it makes a large sum. Omit the one, and the zeroes are nothing. It is the one that makes many. First one, then many. First comes God, then His creatures and the world.

"Your business is to realise God. Why do you worry so much about the world, creation, science, and all that? Suppose you desire to eat mangoes. What would you gain by gathering statistics about the mango-grove?"

Bankim: "Where can I get the mangoes?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Pray to God eagerly. If you are sincere, He will surely respond. Perhaps He will procure the advantage of holy company for you. Or somebody may give you directions as to how to realise God."

Bankim: "You mean the Guru? He keeps the best mangoes for himself and gives me only the bad ones!" (Laughter).

Sri Ramakrishna: "Why do you think so? He knows what would suit a particular temperament. If the mother prepares a light diet for a child with a weak stomach, it does not mean that she loves him the less.

"One must have faith in the words of the Guru. The Guru is God, and God is the Guru. It is by having a childlike faith in his words that one can realise God, not through cleverness or a calculating mind.

One must have faith and sincerity, and no hypocrisy. To the sincere He is very near, but He is far, far away from the hypocrite.

"We want the yearning of the child! Whatever path you follow, whether you be Hindu, Mussalman, Christian, Shakta, Vaishnava, or Brahmo, that is the one vital point. God knows the secrets of our hearts, and it matters little if a wrong path is taken—only you must have sincerity. He Himself will bring you to the right way.

"There are some defects in every path. Every one thinks that his watch is correct, but as a matter of fact, not one shows the correct time. But that doesn't hamper one's work. Through yearning one gains the association of Sadhus, and one can correct one's watch by that standard."

Trailokya Nath Sanyal, who was one of the guests, began to sing. Soon the Master stood up and was lost in Samadhi. All stood round him in a circle. Bankim came closer and watched him attentively. He had never seen anyone in Samadhi before. After a few minutes the Master gained partial consciousness and began an ecstatic dance. The song over, he touched the ground with his head, saying, "*Bhagavata,* Bhakta, Bhagavan. Salutation to the Jnanis, Yogis, Bhaktas and all!" He sat down again, and all sat around him.

Bankim (to Sri Ramakrishna): "Sir, how can one get devotion?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "I have already told you—you must have that yearning. If one weeps for Him with the intense yearning of a child for its mother, one can realise Him.

"What will you gain by swimming on the surface? You must dive deep. The gems lie deep under water, so what's the good of keeping on the surface? A real gem has weight—it doesn't float; it goes to the bottom. If you want to collect the right gem, you must dive deep."

Bankim: "Sir, what can we do? We are tied to a cork which prevents us from diving."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Well, all sins vanish if one remembers Him. His name breaks the fetters of death. You must dive deep, or you won't get the gem."

Then he sang his favourite song, "Dive deep, dive deep, my mind!"—to which everybody listened spellbound. Bankim bowed down before the Master, intending to take his leave.

Bankim: "Sir, I am not really such a fool as you take me for. I have a request to make. Will you kindly grace my hut with your presence?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right, if the Lord wills."

Bankim: "There, too, you will find devotees."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "Well, what sort of devotees are they?"

Then he told an amusing story about some swindling goldsmiths posing as devotees, which was much appreciated.

Sri Ramakrishna did not forget Bankim, though they never met again. And he listened to portions of one of his famous novels, *Devi Chaudhurâni,* and made apposite comments thereon. He also sent Narendra and one or two of his other brilliant disciples to meet and have a talk with him.

OTHER DEVOTEES, OLD AND YOUNG

To the rest of the devotees we can make only passing reference, for want of detailed information. Ishân Chandra Mukherjee of Thanthania, Calcutta—whom we have once mentioned—was a pious and charitable man who visited the Master frequently and occasionally invited him to his house. He was held in high esteem by his friends and neighbours, who sometimes pressed him to settle their disputes. One day Sri Ramakrishna, in an exalted mood, exhorted him not to fritter away his energies that way, but to dive deep into the glories of God till he realised Him.

Navagopâl Ghosh was another devotee. On his first visit he came to Dakshineswar with his wife and children. The Master was greatly attracted towards them. Navagopal did not repeat the visit and forgot all about the Master for three years. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked about him and sent an invitation to him to come to Dakshineswar.

When the news reached Navagopal he was amazed to think that Sri Ramakrishna still remembered him. He went to Dakshineswar and was cordially received. This time Navagopal was charmed with the personality of the Master, who told him that he did not need much spiritual discipline, and that by coming to Dakshineswar he would attain the goal. Navagopal and his whole family became greatly attached to Sri Ramakrishna and often came to Dakshineswar. One day when the Master was in a semi-conscious state, Ramchandra Datta told Navagopal to pray to him for any boon he liked. Navagopal prostrated himself before the Master and said, "I am immersed in worldliness, kindly tell me how I may get out of it." "Don't worry," replied the Master, "remember me once a day if you can do nothing else."

Atul Krishna Ghosh, brother of Girish, at first avoided Paramahamsa Deva, and even nicknamed him Râjahamsa or swan. One day, in his own house, Atul was expressing his opinion of the Master to Girish, when the Master unexpectedly came to call. On seeing Atul, the Master remarked to Girish, "I used to dread your brother; but today he seems different." At this Girish told Sri Ramakrishna about his brother's ridicule. But the Master took it kindly and said, "I take that for a compliment. The duck drinks a mixture of milk and water, but the swan, they say, is able to separate the two and drinks the milk alone. He is, therefore, known as Rajahamsa or king of the ducks. Your brother, therefore, has selected a good name for me." Atul acknowledged it and asked the Master how he should address him. But the Master said, "Why, address me only by vocatives, as they do men in the street." This simplicity on the part of the Master made a deep impression on Atul's mind. Sri Ramakrishna invited him to Dakshineswar, and he accepted. He went there, visited the temples and the places of Sri Ramakrishna's Sadhana. Standing on the banks of the Ganges, he had a wonderful vision. After that he surrendered himself to the Master and accepted him as his guide.

Manilâl Mallik of Sinduriâpati, Calcutta, was an elderly Brahmo devotee who had a great veneration for Sri Ramakrishna. Not only did he visit Dakshineswar, but he invited the Master on special days to his home. It was in response to one of these invitations that the Master attended in

September, 1883, a celebration of the Brahmo Samaj there.

Once Manilal had the misfortune of losing a grown-up son. Stunned by the blow, he went straight from the cremation ground to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to a number of devotees. As soon as his eyes fell on the distracted Manilal, he inquired what the trouble was. The bereaved father sobbed out his tale of woe. Some of those present tried to console him with words of sympathy. But the Master silently listened to the old man. After some time he fell into a semi-conscious state, and suddenly standing up, sang a devotional song beginning with, "To arms! O man, for Death attacks thy house!"—accompanying it with spirited gestures. His radiant expression at once changed the whole atmosphere of the place and soothed Manilal. After the song, the Master regained normal consciousness and with great sympathy began to talk with Manilal about the natural distress on the loss of a son, referring to his own experience at the death of his nephew Akshay. He finished by saying, "But those who hold on to the Lord soon get over these calamities, like the large craft on a river when a steamer passes by." After a long and melancholy pause—as if the misfortune had befallen himself—he drew Manilal's attention to the fleeting nature of earthly relationships and pointed out that man's only refuge lay in surrendering himself to God. Manilal was comforted and said, "That's why I came to you. I knew that no one else could assuage my sorrow."

Nityagopâl Goswâmi, the son of Krishna Kamal Goswami, a popular Bengali author, came from Dacca. A sincere seeker for truth, he was at first a Theosophist. At Dacca he heard from Vijay Krishna Goswami about Sri Ramakrishna and started at once for Dakshineswar. The Master was eating when Nityagopal entered the room. He left the meal half-finished to accost the new-comer, so delighted was he to see him. He then retired for rest and asked Nityagopal to gently massage his feet. The young devotee found here the fountain of peace and happiness for which he had been searching so long.

Pundit Shyâmâpada Bhattâchârya was a great scholar, from Antpur, where Baburam also was born. In August, 1885, he came to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. At dusk he went to the banks of the Ganges for his evening devotions. While so engaged, he had an extraordinary vision. Afterwards he returned to Sri Ramakrishna's room and sat on the floor. The Master said to Mahendra, "He is a fine man." The Pundit recited a hymn from the *Bhagavata,* during which Sri Ramakrishna entered into Samadhi. He placed one of his feet on the lap of the Pundit who clasped it and said, "Master, graciously illumine my heart."

Sri Ramakrishna then came to normal consciousness and said to Mahendra after the Pundit's departure, "Can you not see how my words are coming true? Those who sincerely pray to the Lord must come here."

We have seen that Balaram became a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. His closeness to the Master, however, irritated many of his aristocratic relatives. Failing to influence him, they gave a distorted version of the situation to his cousin, Hari Ballabh Bose, Government Pleader of Cuttack. Hari Ballabh wrote to Balaram that he would be coming shortly to Calcutta, intending to spend a few days with him. From the letter Balaram got an inkling of his cousin's displeasure at his association with Sri Ramakrishna. He was in despair to think lest his cousin should try to take him away from Calcutta, but he was resolved that he would never leave Sri Ramakrishna. When Hari Ballabh arrived in Calcutta Balaram arranged for his comfort, but continued to visit Sri Ramakrishna as before.

The Master was then lying ill at Shyampukur, Calcutta. When Balaram went there, the Master gathered from his face that he was troubled about something. He called Balaram to him and asked what was bothering him. After hearing all, he said, "What sort of man is he? Can you bring him here?" "He is a good man in every way," replied Balaram, "he is educated, intelligent, generous, and devoted to God. His one defect is that he believes everything he is told, hence he has a queer idea of you. I don't know whether he will be willing to come or not." The Master said, "Then you do not bother yourself about it, call Girish." As Hari Ballabh was his class-mate, Girish cheerfully agreed to bring him to the Master. The very next day (October, 1885) Girish brought Hari Ballabh and introduced him to the Master, who received him cordially and said, "I have heard of you from many people and often wished to see you. But I was afraid that you might be a sophisticated man, and I find that this is not so." Then he said to Girish, "He is as frank as a child. Do you notice his eyes? A man cannot have such eyes unless his heart is full of devotion to God." The Master laid his hand on Hari Ballabh's arm and said, "Really you do not make me nervous; on the contrary I look upon you as a relative." Hari Ballabh bowed down before him and taking the dust of his feet said, "That is due to your grace."

In the course of the religious discussion that followed, the Master said that faith in God, devotion, and absolute surrender were the chief means to spirituality. He asked one of his young disciples to sing a song, and as he explained its meaning to Hari Ballabh he plunged into Samadhi. After the song, it was found that two or three young men had also fallen into trance. Hari Ballabh experienced a strange emotion, and tears poured from his eyes; he was charmed with the words of the Master as well as by his illumined face. At nightfall he took his leave, with his views about the Master altogether changed. Thereafter he visited him quite frequently and showed him great reverence.

Referring to him, Sri Ramakrishna one day remarked to M., "Well, didn't I tell you of two men whom I had seen in a trance? One of them was Dr. Sarkar, and Hari Ballabh is the other. So you see he came."

Bhupati, a young Brahmo, heard about Sri Ramakrishna and came to Dakshineswar to meet him. At the very first meeting he became a devotee. A man of many parts, he was beloved by the Master for his simplicity and unflinching faith in God. At that time he was a student, but the more he saw of Sri Ramakrishna, the less he thought of his studies. One day he was sitting near the door of the Kali temple, singing with great fervour of the glory of God. The Master heard the song from a distance, and coming to him in a state of trance placed his foot on his chest. In the ecstasy that followed the touch, Bhupati saw standing before him his beloved Ishta Deva.

Having tasted of the sweetness of divine bliss through association with the Master, the devotees brought fresh recruits to Dakshineswar. Surendra brought his brother Girindra, a Brahmo by faith without belief in God with form. Sri Ramakrishna helped him so that he derived joy from sources hitherto unknown to him. Manomohan introduced his uncle Nabâi Chaitanya. Devendranath Mazumdar brought Akshay Kumar Sen, whom the Master later on initiated. It was he who afterwards wrote a beautiful biography of the Master in Bengali verse.

Other householder devotees who used to frequent Dakshineswar were Kavirâj Mahendra Nâth Pâl of Sinthi, Chunilâl Bose of Baghbazar, Upendra Nath Mukherjee (afterwards Proprietor of the *Basumati*), Kishori, the brother of M., Haramohan Mazumdar of Baranagore, and Kishori Mohan Rai of Ban Hooghly. All of them were blessed by the Master. Among some distinguished visitors we shall mention only one, viz Nilakantha Mukherjee, the famous singer and composer, whom Sri Ramakrishna particularly liked for his devotion.

As we already know, the grace of Sri Ramakrishna was abundantly showered upon young boys, whom he considered fit recipients of spiritual knowledge. Through fun and merriment, of which his mind was an inexhaustible store-house, he, without their knowledge, gradually directed their minds towards God.

Narayan, a young Brahmin student, belonged to a well-to-do family, but his people did not like his association with Sri Ramakrishna, and beat him for visiting Dakshineswar. Still he came every now and then, and the Master, who loved him for his sincerity and devotion to God, often paid his carriage-hire.

From his physiognomy the Master prophesied success in spirituality for him. One day Sri Ramakrishna was listening to a Sankirtana in the verandah of his room, when Narayan came. Impelled by a higher power, the Master left his seat before the song was finished to feed the boy with sweets. He afterwards marvelled at his own unusual conduct and attributed it to Narayan's great potential spirituality. One day Narayan's mother came to Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna tactfully softened her mind, so that she might give her son freedom to pursue a religious career.

Through the kind ministrations of Mahendra many other boys were blessed by coming in contact with the Master. Tejchandra, Haripada, Dwija, Pramatha *alias* Paltu, Naren Junior, and Purna were some of them. Among these boys the last two deserve special mention.

Naren Junior—whose full name was Narendra Nath Mitra—was possessed of a great spiritual temperament. Even as a boy he used to weep for God. The Master spoke highly of his keen intelligence, which reminded him of his Guru, Totapuri. Naren loved Sri Ramakrishna with his whole heart. In spite of punishment from his guardians he used to spend two or three days at a time at Dakshineswar. At the name of God he would plunge into deep trances—lasting sometimes for two hours or more. One day Sri Ramakrishna said to Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar, "This boy possesses an exceptionally pure soul, uncontaminated by the slightest touch of worldliness. Look how ingenuous is his laugh!" People were amazed at the yearning which Sri Ramakrishna felt for Naren Junior. If he would absent himself for some days from Dakshineswar, the Master would send for him, and when he came he fed him with his own hands. Many a time he wept and prayed for the boy to the Divine Mother!

The Master once made this significant remark to him, "It is not enough to be convinced of the existence of God. Even to have a vision of Him is not the culmination of spiritual life. You must be intimately familiar with Him—you must have direct communion with Him. Some have heard of God, others have seen Him, but only a few have thoroughly tasted Him. Many may have seen the king. But very few can entertain him as a guest in their homes."

One day a curious incident happened. Sri Ramakrishna was in Samadhi, standing. Lest he should fall, Naren Junior hastened to support him. He had done so many times, and there was no objection because of his purity. But in this instance the Master gave a scream of pain as soon as he touched him. Naren, completely taken aback, at once let go. He was mortified, as it could mean nothing but that his mind had become impure. But Sri Ramakrishna, after he had regained consciousness, explained the matter, to the great relief of Naren. The boy had recently undergone an operation, and the wound had not yet healed up. We read in the scriptures that one with a wound in his body must not touch a divine form. In Samadhi, Sri Ramakrishna was one with the Divinity, and his automatic recoil from the touch of Naren clearly attested the truth of the scriptural dictum.

But great as Naren Junior was, Sri Ramakrishna had a greater admiration for his other disciple, Purna Chandra Ghosh. Purna was a boy of only thirteen, reading in the Vidyasagar School. His guardians were very strict, and he had to meet the Master secretly. At the very first meeting Sri Ramakrishna was highly impressed by the boy, fed him and gave him instructions in prayer and meditation. He asked him to come to Dakshineswar and gave him money for carriage-hire. The Master said of him to his devotees, "Purna has some of the attributes of the Lord Narayana. He is full of Sattva. He is the last of that series of brilliant devotees who, I saw in that trance, would come to me for spiritual illumination."

Purna experienced great bliss in meeting the Master. By intuition he gained knowledge of the special relationship that was to exist between them. On their second meeting, which took place at Balaram Bose's house, the Master asked Purna his opinion of him. Purna replied with much emotion, "You are God Himself, incarnated in flesh and blood!" Sri Ramakrishna was surprised and delighted with the answer, which showed of what stuff the boy was made. He blessed Purna and initiated him into the mystery of Shakti worship.

One day Balaram asked the Master how it was that Purna had acquired such spiritual fervour in spite of his youth. Sri Ramakrishna replied, "This is the result of work in past births. He has already passed through the preliminary stages. The body alone grows and decays, but not the Soul. Purna belongs to the special class of devotees known as Ishwarakoti. A little effort brings out their latent spirituality. A devotee of this order is like the vine of gourd or pumpkin, which bears fruit first and flower afterwards. First they realise God, and spiritual discipline comes afterwards."

After contact with the Master, Purna began to experience great waves of spiritual emotion; tears would flow and the hair of his body stand on end. One day he wrote to Sri Ramakrishna, "I often pass sleepless nights because of excessive joy." The Master took up the letter, and as he pressed it between his palms said, "This is a good letter, for I can touch it. Others' letters I cannot touch." The Master often became exceedingly eager to meet him. One night he unexpectedly came from Dakshineswar to M.'s house to see Purna. M. himself brought the boy to him, and the Master gave him advice on spiritual matters. This holy association between the two souls bore their natural result as years rolled on.

WOMEN DEVOTEES

"We seldom looked upon Sri Ramakrishna as a member of the male sex. We always considered him as one of us. Therefore we did not feel the least constraint before him. He was our best confidant."—This was the general opinion of the women devotees of the Master of whom there were many. All of them revered the Master greatly, and some of them had the good fortune of becoming his disciples. He seemed like a dear relative and engrossed all their thoughts. Whenever any delicacy was prepared, a portion of it was set aside for Sri Ramakrishna and sent to him. They walked great distances to see him, regardless of their position or etiquette. At his bidding they even went to the market at Dakshineswar to buy things for him. He made them undergo this discipline in order to wean them gradually from the body idea. He, on his part, was free as a child with them, and sought their opinion on various matters. With the instinct of the seer he called one of them a blessed Gopi of Vrindaban because of her devotion, another a cook of Vaikuntha, the sphere of the Lord Vishnu, as a tribute to her skill in the culinary art, and so on. He read their thoughts and understood their feelings as easily as those of men. The religious practices of his earlier years may have helped him in this. And as his mind was absolutely pure, it was but natural that he evoked only the highest sentiments in them. He advised them to renounce lust and wealth and warned them against the snares of men.

Among his women devotees Sri Ramakrishna assigned a high place to the mother of Manomohan Mitra. Indeed she was a person of rare spiritual gifts. An ideal wife during the lifetime of her husband, looking upon marriage as an inviolable religious sacrament, after his death she considered herself practically dead to the world. One day she was seated in Sri Ramakrishna's room with other women, when the conversation drifted to the duty of women. The Master said that the whole duty of a woman consisted in faithful service to her husband. The chaste wife should worship him as the embodiment of God. There were not wanting women who, even after the death of their husbands, worshipped them as Sri Krishna, the Lord of all souls. Then he told the following story: A queen, during the lifetime of her husband, wore only a pair of iron bracelets on her wrists, setting aside the desires of her relatives who pressed her to wear gold and jewellery. When the king passed away, the queen broke her iron bracelets and put on all her gold ornaments. Everyone was greatly astonished at this. In response to a friendly query she said, "When my husband was present as a perishable human figure, I used the inferior iron bracelets. Now that he is one with the Supreme Self, Eternal and Immutable, I wear these valuable gold ornaments." Pointing to the mother of Manomohan the Master added, "That is the reason that she wears her gold bracelets. She cherishes the same lofty feelings towards her husband." When her son-in-law, Rakhal, became much attracted to Sri Ramakrishna, and everybody talked of his probable renunciation, she said, "It would indeed be an auspicious moment of my life if my son-in-law renounced the world in quest of God and dedicated himself to the service of monks and saints." Her regard for the Master was unbounded, and she thought nothing of dispensing with the time-honoured formalities of religion if she knew that Sri Ramakrishna wished it.

Another great woman devotee was known later as Yogin-Mâ. She was a rich man's wife, but owing to family troubles was most unhappy. One day she heard from Balaram, who was a relative, of Sri Ramakrishna and took the first opportunity to go to Dakshineswar. At the sight of the Master she forgot all her sorrows and afflictions. He was glad to meet her and introduced her to the Holy Mother. From the very first Yogin-Ma surrendered herself completely at the feet of the Master; she came frequently to Dakshineswar and sometimes spent several days at a time with the Holy Mother. She was initiated by the Master and spent the greater part of the day in various religious practices. Referring to her, the Master once remarked, "She is a devotee of rare spiritual attainments. In the fulness of time, people will wonder at her many realisations." This prophecy came true; for after a short practice Yogin-Ma would fall into trances while meditating on God. Later on she became a constant companion of the Holy Mother.

Another woman devotee was a middle-aged widow, afterwards known as Golâp-Mâ. She was in great grief at the death of her only daughter. Hearing of Sri Ramakrishna from Yogin-Ma, she set out for Dakshineswar and unfolded her sad tale to the Master. He became semi-conscious and in that state said, "You are fortunate. God Himself helps those who have none else in the world to call their own." The words breathed new life into her. Sri Ramakrishna accepted her as his own, and she soon tasted of the bliss of devotion. He also went with his devotees to her house. Golap-Ma was so happy at this that she could scarcely contain her joy.

The following incident, though it happened a little later, during the early stage of the Master's last illness, we shall give here. One day Golap-Ma told the Master that she knew of an expert physician who might treat his case successfully. Sri Ramakrishna, like a boy, jumped at the idea and proposed to see the doctor the next morning. He set out for Calcutta from Dakshineswar by boat, accompanied by Golap-Ma, Latu, and Kali. Reaching Calcutta, they consulted the doctor, who prescribed certain medicines. On their way back to Dakshineswar they felt very hungry. The Master inquired if any of the devotees had any money. None but Golap-Ma had any, and that was but four pice. The Master asked Kali to take it and buy something at the nearest market. Kali purchased an anna worth of sweets from Baranagore. The Master, much to the surprise of the others, ate them all. He then drank water from the Ganges and said, "Ah, I am satisfied." As the Master declared his satisfaction, the hunger of the three, who were mutely watching, vanished. They felt quite satisfied—they did not know how, nor why. A Great Yogi that he was, Sri Ramakrishna made use of his superior knowledge to feed four hungry mouths in feeding his own. We read that ages ago, Sri Krishna did the same thing but on a larger scale. Nature unfolds its secrets to the one who has access to them. Time or place makes no difference. It may be a platitude, but it seems worth repeating, that given similar conditions, incidents repeat themselves.

The Mother of Devendranath Mazumdar looked upon Sri Ramakrishna as her own child. One day she came to Dakshineswar with her son and some others, and unknown to Devendra, brought some puffed sugar pellets as an offering to the deities of Rasmani's temple. They reached the garden at noon and found the Master seated on his smaller bedstead. All prostrated themselves before him, except the aged lady, who, regarding him as her son, did not bow. Sri Ramakrishna addressed her as mother and made her sit beside him on the bed. They talked with each other like mother and child, and the lady was so much overwhelmed with joy that she totally forgot about the little bundle of sweets. Curiously enough, Sri Ramakrishna after a while expressed a desire for that particular kind of sweetmeat. Devendra sent one of his companions to the market to purchase it. But the Master gradually became impatient, and like a child began to pull at the lady's cloth. Presently the bundle of sweetmeats was disclosed to view, much to the Master's joy. He ate them with gusto, and Devendra's mother could not check her tears as she looked on.

An aged relative of Jadunath Mallik was greatly devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and often invited him to Jadu's garden-house, near the Kali temple. One day she arranged her various offerings in her own room and sat in meditation. Sri Ramakrishna fell into a trance while speaking with some of his devotees. In that state he left the Kali temple and entered the room where the old lady was meditating. She opened her eyes and found the Master eating the offerings meant for her Chosen Ideal. Tears flowed from her eyes at this unexpected token of divine grace, and in a voice choked with emotion she said, "Ah, today the aspirations of my mind have been fulfilled. I have realised your true nature. Bless me that I may realise God in this very birth." Sri Ramakrishna touched her head with his foot and she experienced the rare bliss of divine communion.

The daughter of the Brahmo devotee Manilal Mallik was very pious and cherished a high regard for the Master. She was greatly distracted during meditation. One day she told the Master about it and asked his advice. He asked her whom she loved most in the world. She replied that it was her brother's child. The Master told her to meditate on the boy, thinking of him as the Baby Krishna. The lady followed this novel instruction and as a result of the concentration that ensued, was blessed in a short time with various divine visions.

Gaur-Dâsi, or Gauri-Mâ as she is more popularly known in the circle of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees, was a remarkable lady of great devotion and renunciation. She early embraced the life of a nun and practised the Vaishnava form of worship at Vrindaban. Learning of Sri Ramakrishna from Balaram Bose, she came to Calcutta and went to Dakshineswar. At the very first meeting, she believed the Master to be an incarnation of Sri Gauranga and became intensely devoted to him. She would often stay at Dakshineswar with the Holy Mother and sometimes cook for the Master. One day a desire came to her to experience for herself the flood of divine emotion that had been so often manifested in Sri Gauranga. Though she told no one of it, the desire was strangely fulfilled in the following way.

One morning a number of devotees arrived at Dakshineswar. Gauri-Ma cooked the meal for the Master that day and came to his room with the dish of food in her hand. Kedarnath Chatterjee was there, and Sri Ramakrishna introduced him to Gauri-Ma.

Both were of the same faith, and as they looked at each other, they felt a tremendous rush of feeling. They stood gazing at each other, and large tear drops rolled down their cheeks. At the sight of this emotion, the Master, who had scarcely tasted the food, stood up. All the devotees present in the room closed in. A divine thrill pervaded the whole atmosphere, and the devotees, caught in it, forgot themselves and the world. Some began to laugh, some wept, and others sang or danced in the exuberance of joy. Some began to shake, and others rolled on the ground unconscious. In the twinkling of an eye all this came about—nobody was prepared for it. This divine intoxication continued for some time, after which Sri Ramakrishna touched and restored all to the normal state.

But undoubtedly the most marvellous of Sri Ramakrishna's relationship was with an orthodox Brahmin woman named Aghoremani Devi, later on known as Gopâla's Mother. Widowed when quite a girl, she formed a friendship with the widow of Govinda Chandra Datta of Pataldângâ, Calcutta, who had built a temple to Radha-Govinda at Kâmârhâti, some three miles north of Dakshineswar. Aghoremani made this temple her home and occupied a small room just on the bank of the Ganges. Both she and the mistress of the temple led a life of extreme restraint and devotion. Aghoremani was a woman of independent spirit, living on the interest of a small sum she possessed. She was born with Vaishnava instincts and in course of time was initiated by a Vaishnava Guru. Gopala or Baby Krishna, was her favourite Deity, whom she looked upon as her own child. Her little cell was singularly devoid of all comforts. She had an old copy of the *Ramayana* and her little bag with the rosary.

Hour after hour, day after day, for thirty years had she sat absorbed in telling her beads there.

When one afternoon, in the year 1884, Aghoremani with two companions, went to see Sri Ramakrishna, she was about sixty years of age. The Master received them kindly, spoke on devotion and sang a few songs. He also asked them to come again. Aghoremani was much attracted to Sri Ramakrishna. "He is a nice man, a real devotee, and I must try to come again," she thought as she returned to Kamarhati. The Master praised her and one of her companions, the widow of Govinda Babu, saying that everything about them bespoke their genuine but unostentatious devotion.

Shortly after, she went to Dakshineswar again, with two or three pice worth of the most ordinary sweets. "Oh, you have come," said Sri Ramakrishna as soon as he saw her. "Give me what you have brought for me." With great hesitation Aghoremani produced the sweets, which the Master ate with relish. "Why do you spend your money in purchasing these things from the market? Prepare some sweetened cocoanut balls at home, and bring one or two of them when you come here. Or you may bring a little of the common dishes which you cook for yourself. I wish very much to eat things cooked by you." Aghoremani used to say later on, "Instead of speaking about God or religion, he spoke about this food or that food. I thought, 'What a queer monk! He only talks of food! And I am a poor widow. How can I feed him every day? Well, I must not come to him any more.' But as soon as I crossed the boundary of the garden, I again felt an irresistible attraction towards him. With great difficulty could I persuade myself to return to Kamarhati." A few days later she again came to Dakshineswar on foot, with some curry of her own making. Sri Ramakirshna ate it with great pleasure and extolled her skill in cooking.

During the next three or four months she went to Dakshineswar every now and then. She would share with the Master any special dish which she cooked; he would eat with great relish and ask for more. Sometimes the widow would think in disgust, "O Gopala! Is this the result of my constant prayers? You have brought me to a monk who always hankers for food. I shall never come here again." But she could not resist his attraction, which made itself felt as soon as she left. Sri Ramakrishna went once to Kamarhati, praised the regular service of the deities there, and during a Kirtana fell into frequent trances.

One morning, at 3 o'clock, in the spring of 1885, Aghoremani, according to her usual routine, sat to tell her beads. After the Japa she was about to surrender the fruits of it to her Chosen Ideal, when she was startled to find that Sri Ramakrishna was sitting on her left, with his right fist clenched. She thought in wonder, "What is this! What on earth could bring him here at this hour?" We shall tell of her experience in her own words:[1]

"While I looked at him wondering how he came there, he kept on smiling. Picking up courage I caught hold of his left hand; suddenly the figure vanished and in place of it appeared the real Gopala, of this size (indicating it), who crawled towards me and raising one arm, with his eyes fixed on me, (O the beauty of it!) lisped, 'Mamma, give me butter!' I was so surprised! I cried aloud with joy. It was a lonely place, or a crowd would have gathered. I said weeping, 'Alas, I am a poor and helpless widow. Where shall I get cream and butter for you, my child?' But Gopala would not listen to me. 'Give me something to eat,' he said again and again. Weeping I got up and brought him some dry cocoanut candies. 'Gopala, my darling,' I said, 'I offer you this wretched thing, but don't give me such a poor thing in return.' I could not perform Japa that day. Gopala sat on my lap, snatched my rosary away, jumped on my shoulders and moved about in the room! As soon as the day broke, I hastened like an insane woman to Dakshineswar. Gopala accompanied me, resting his head on my shoulder. Pressing him against my breast I walked all the way. His tiny ruddy feet I clearly saw hanging over my breast."

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[1] This is one of those happenings for which no explanation is attempted.

Golap-Ma was present on the occasion. We describe what followed in her words:

"It was seven or half past seven in the morning. I was sweeping the Master's room, when I heard somebody advancing towards it crying, 'Gopala, Gopala!' The voice, which seemed familiar, came nearer and nearer. At last I found it was Aghoremani—almost mad, with dishevelled hair, staring eyes, and the end of her cloth trailing on the ground. Dead to all considerations of the body or the outside world, she entered the room through the eastern door. Sri Ramakrishna was then seated on his smaller bedstead.

"I was speechless with wonder to see her in that state. The Master, in the meantime, had fallen into a trance. Aghoremani drew near and sat beside him. He like a child, sat on her lap. Tears were flowing profusely from her eyes. She had brought cream, butter, and other delicacies with her, with which she was feeding the Master. I was extremely surprised, for never before had I seen the Master touching a woman in a state of trance. I only heard that long long ago he used to sit on the lap of his teacher, the Bhairavi Brahmani, as her child, when she was inspired with the sentiments of Yashoda, the mother of Krishna. After some time the Master was restored to normal consciousness and returned to his bedstead. But the floodgate of emotion had been opened in the heart of Aghoremani, and she was still on another plane of consciousness. In rapturous ecstasy she danced about the room. Noticing this the Master said to me with a smile, 'Look at her. She is steeped in bliss. Her mind has fled to the region of Gopala'."

Flooded with emotion, Aghoremani began to talk with Sri Ramakrishna in words which were scarcely intelligible to the outsider. "Here is Gopala, in my arms."—"Now he enters into you."—"There, he has emerged again."—"Come, my darling, to your afflicted mother." Thus did she describe the movements of the nimble Gopala. How could she remain steady in such paroxysms of joy? From that day forth Aghoremani came to be called Gopala's Mother. Sri Ramakrishna warmly congratulated her on this unique realisation. To quiet her, he began to stroke her chest, and shared with her whatever dainties he had. Even while partaking of them, she, still in a state of ecstasy, said, "Gopala, my dear, your mother has led a most unhappy life on earth. She had to earn her livelihood by spinning. Is that why you are so loving today?"

After keeping her the whole day at Dakshineswar and making her bathe and eat, the Master sent her back to Kamarhati in the evening. The Baby Krishna of her vision also went with her, nestled in her arms. Reaching her cell, she sat to tell beads as before, but it was impossible. The beloved object of her meditation and prayer—in whose search she had spent her whole life—was gambolling before her! She went to bed with Gopala by her side. She had a hard bed without a pillow, but Gopala began to fret for a pillow. So she placed his tiny head upon her arm and drawing him close to her tried to console him saying, "Pass this night thus, my child, and tomorrow morning I will get you a soft pillow."

The next day Gopala's Mother set about collecting some dry wood in order to cook for her Gopala. The child accompanied her and helped her in her work! Then began the cooking, and the naughty child began to play tricks on her. The adoring mother sometimes fondled him, and sometimes administered a rebuke.

A few days after, Gopala's Mother came to Dakshineswar, and after seeing Sri Ramakrishna, went to the Holy Mother in the concert-room. She told her beads as usual and on the completion of it was saluting her Deity, when the Master came. He said to her, "Why do you tell your beads so much now? Haven't you got enough realisation already?"

The lady: "Shall I stop it then? Have I finished everything?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you have."

The lady: "Everything?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, everything."

The lady: "Indeed! Do you really mean that I have finished everything?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "Yes, you have finished all your spiritual exercises, so far as you yourself are concerned. But you may, if you like, pray for the welfare of this body (meaning himself)."

Referring to this incident the venerable lady afterwards said, "Hearing this from his lips, I threw my rosary and the little bag into the Ganges. For Gopala's sake (she used to address the Master with this epithet) I repeated the name of God on my fingers only. Long after, I procured another rosary. I had to spend the day somehow, and this was the best way to keep myself engaged. And so I tell my beads even now."

So after years of steady practice, Gopala's Mother attained her goal. Her visit to Dakshineswar became more frequent. Her hitherto extreme scrupulousness in matters of food and cleanliness gradually lessened; orthodox methods became impossible to her. Gopala now became her visible teacher. The Divine Baby wished to eat every now and then; sometimes he put a part of the food into her mouth. How could she refuse it? Gopala wept if she did so. She was convinced, besides, that this was all Ramakrishna's doing, and that he was really her Gopala, and she felt no hesitation in accepting the food touched by him.

Aghoremani spent a couple of months in this uninterrupted communion with God. During all this time Gopala did not leave her for a moment. It is only the very fortunate few who can live at such dizzy spiritual heights for so long. Sri Ramakrishna once said to her, "You have achieved the impossible. Such a realisation as yours is rare in this age." Perhaps it was the will of God that she should be spared a few years more in the world, to serve as a glorious example of the intimate relationship which it is possible to establish with God. After two months the vision became interrupted and less vivid, but she could always see him during meditation.

Every year Balaram Bose used to celebrate the Car Festival in his house at Baghbazar, and with some of his devotees the Master was invited on that occasion.

The following incident took place in the year 1885 during one of those festivals.

The Master arrived in the morning with some devotees. Some women devotees came there to take advantage of this opportunity of seeing the Master. At a suggestion from Sri Ramakrishna, Balaram sent a man to bring Gopala's Mother from Kamarhati. In the afternoon the Master sat in the parlour conversing with the devotees. Darkness was falling, when suddenly the Master fell into a trance, assuming the posture of Baby Krishna as shown in the picture. His two knees and one hand rested on the ground; the other hand was raised, and the face was turned up as if he were expecting someone. Nobody understood the reason for this sudden change. A few minutes after, the carriage of Gopala's Mother drew up before the house, and the fortunate lady found Sri Ramakrishna in the posture of her Chosen Ideal. Those assembled realised that it was her devotion that had influenced the Master. "I don't like this stiff posture." said Gopala's Mother: "My Gopala should laugh and play and walk and run. But what is this! He has become stiff as a log. I don't like to see this sort of Gopala!"

Sri Ramakrishna stayed at Balaram's house for two days. On the third morning he set out for Dakshineswar. Gopala's Mother and Golap-Ma accompanied him. The ladies of Balaram's family presented Aghoremani with a few pieces of cloth and some utensils, which were put into the boat. When the boat had gone a little distance, the Master's eyes fell on the bundle, and he asked what was in it. When he learned of its contents he gravely remarked to Golap-Ma, "He alone realises God who renounces everything for His sake. The devotee who is simply satisfied with another man's hospitality and returns without having his hands filled with additional presents, sits very close to God." He did not exchange a single word with Gopala's Mother, but kept looking at her bundle. She was stung with remorse and thought of throwing it away. Sri Ramakrishna was usually very kind, but he could be implacable when necessary. The method of punishment was usually very simple—a little indifference, or at the most, a mild remonstrance. His superhuman love did the rest.

Reaching Dakshineswar, Gopala's Mother went to the Holy Mother and said anxiously, "Gopala is angry with me over this bundle of things. What shall I do? I shall distribute them here instead of taking them home." The Holy Mother consoled the old lady and said, "Don't worry, mother. Let him say what he will. There is none in the world to help you. It is because you require these things that you have accepted them." Nevertheless, Gopala's Mother gave away some of the things. Then she cooked some curries for the Master and went to feed him, but not without some apprehension. Sri Ramakrishna seeing her penitence never referred again to the matter, much to her relief. She returned cheerfully to Kamarhati in the evening.

After the realisation, the old lady's scruples about caste and other considerations in regard to certain of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees also gradually lessened. Ever since her conviction of the identity of Sri Ramakrishna and Gopala, she used to see him more often than Gopala at the time of meditation. Through him Gopala would instruct her. At first she was anxious at not seeing the Gopala form and one day actually said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Gopala, why have you punished me like this? What offence have I committed that I no longer see you in the Baby form?" The Master consoled her and said, "It is impossible for the physical body to survive long in this Kali Yuga, if the mind be constantly attuned to the highest plane of consciousness." It was indeed a fact that for the two months immediately following her realisation she lived in quite another world, was almost oblivious of the body, and went through her daily routine automatically, by the sheer force of habit.

The Master's love and esteem for this saintly woman cannot be described. At that time many businessmen used to visit him and present him with sugar-candy and fruits, which he seldom ate himself or gave to his devotees. He used to say that behind these offerings there were always some gross selfish motives, which were sure to contaminate the minds of those who partook of them. But he made two exceptions. One of these was Narendra, whose burning illumination was proof against all impurity, and the other, Gopala's Mother, who was raised above all earthly taint. One day she came to see the Master with some other women devotees. When he saw her he began to caress her like a child. Pointing to her he said to those present, "Ah, there is nothing inside this body except God. He fills it through and through." Gopala's Mother stood silent. She even allowed the Master to touch her feet. Then he began to feed her, whereupon she said, "Why are you so fond of feeding me?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "You also fed me with many things in the past."

The lady: "In the past? When?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "In your previous births."

As she was leaving for Kamarhati in the evening, the Master asked her to accept a large quantity of sugar-candy, the gift of the businessmen. She said, "Why do you give me so much sugar-candy?" The

Master touched her chin with great tenderness and said, "Well, you were molasses before, then you became sugar, and now you are sugar-candy. Therefore, eat sugar-candy and rejoice."

One day Gopala's Mother and Narendra Nath were present at Dakshineswar. Nothing could present a more striking contrast than those two. Sri Ramakrishna, with his unsurpassed sense of humour, could not resist the temptation of setting these two devotees to compare notes. He asked Gopala's Mother to recount her experiences before Narendra Nath. "But will there not be harm in telling them?" she asked, for the Master had once warned her not to divulge them, even to himself. Encouraged by the Master, she narrated, amid tears, all those thrilling incidents of her life which seemed miraculous. Now, beneath his rationalistic veneer Narendra Nath possessed an inexhaustible fund of devotion and religious fervour, and as he heard the recital, he could not check his tears. The old lady now and then would interrupt her story to say, "My son, you are learned and intelligent, and I am a poor, illiterate widow. I don't understand anything. Tell me if you consider my visions of Gopala to be real." Every time Narendra answered that they were all true—true to the very letter.

FAREWELL TO DAKSHINESWAR

There is a liquid beauty in the rising sun, there is a royal splendour in its midday blaze, and there is also an exquisite grace in its setting glow. So it is with the life of a great man. There is a sweetness in its childhood and adolescence, there is resplendence in its maturity, and again there is a deep pathos in its last days. We have followed the course of the Master's life through its early stage and growth to maturity. Now we must turn our attention to the closing scenes.

During the sultry months of the year 1885, the Master suffered a great deal from the terrible heat, which was alleviated by the ice which the devotees brought to him daily. But this frequent use of ice produced a pain in the throat which was at first so trifling as to pass unnoticed. But in a month it became so much aggravated, specially whenever the Master talked or after Samadhi, that the disciples grew alarmed and called in Dr. Rakhal Chandra Hâldâr of Bowbazar, a specialist in diseases of the throat. He prescribed some medicine and advised the Master not to talk much or to fall into trances. But it was very difficult to carry out these instructions.

In a previous chapter it was told how the Master, during his Sadhana period, often used to attend the great Vaishnava festivals at Panihati, a few miles north of Dakshineswar, and would fall into trance. This year he proposed to go there with his young devotees who had never seen this "emporium of joy and chanting of the Lord's name," as he called it. This was directly contrary to the advice of the doctor, and the older disciples tried to dissuade him from going. The Master, however, silenced them by saying, "We shall go after early breakfast, and remain there for an hour or two. That won't do much harm. And I shall take precautions against falling into trances."

On the morning of the appointed day, the devotees, about twenty-five in number, came to Dakshineswar in two boats, ready to accompany the Master, for whom a separate boat had been engaged. A few women devotees also were to join the party. The Holy Mother, then at Dakshineswar, asked Sri Ramakrishna, through one of the women, if she, too, might go. The Master said, "You are all going, are you not? Well, if she likes, she may go." The Holy Mother took the hint and decided not to go.

The boats reached Panihati about noon. Around the ancient peepul tree, on the Ganges, there was a large concourse of men and women, and parties of Vaishnavas were singing here and there. Narendra, Balaram, Girish, Ramchandra, M., and other devotees entreated the Master again and again to keep aloof from the singing parties. Sri Ramakrishna, with his devotees, walked to the house of Mani Sen, the zemindar of the place, who received them warmly.

The two chief places of interest at Panihati are the temple of Râdhâkânta adjoining the house of Mani Babu, and the abode of Râghav Pundit, a devoted follower of Sri Gauranga, situated a mile off. The festival itself commemorates the feast given by Raghunâth Dâs, another distinguished disciple of Sri Gauranga, to Nityananda and his party. It was here that this God-intoxicated son of a wealthy nobleman was blessed by Nityananda and permitted to renounce wife and home and take shelter at the feet of Sri Gauranga at Puri.

After a little rest, the Master and his devotees visited the deities in the temple. In the courtyard a party of singers was chanting the name of God. Just then a man, tricked out in all the insignia of a Vaishnava, came to the spot, rosary in hand, and began to shout and dance with the musicians, imitating a devotee in an exalted mood. Sri Ramakrishna at once saw through the sham. He was in perfect control of his feelings; but in the twinkling of an eye, he broke loose from the ring of his devotees and stood in the midst of the singing party in a state of Samadhi. Narendra and others closed round him in haste. Now the Master danced in wild ecstasy, again he stood statue-like in Samadhi. While dancing, he advanced and retreated in quick steps in time with the music. The grace of his movements and the divine fervour which they expressed were unique. The presence of the Master increased the enthusiasm of the singers a hundredfold, and they chanted the Lord's name with great fervour. After half an hour the Master became conscious of the outside world. The devotees tried to separate him from the band of singers, so that he might return quickly to the boat after visiting the seat of Raghav Pundit, but the singers followed. The Master advanced a few steps and then fell into a trance. Regaining a little consciousness he proceeded again, and fell into Samadhi. Thus it went on. The progress, therefore, was very slow.

The exquisite beauty of Sri Ramakrishna's person on this day, during the state of trance, beggars all description. He seemed taller and lighter in complexion than usual. His countenance shone with a celestial glow; and dignity, compassion, peace, and bliss were written on it. His smile acted like a magic spell upon the spectators, who forgot everything else. His orange silk cloth set off his beauty. Even his immediate attendants were astonished at the wonderful transfiguration. Gradually other musical parties were caught up in the contagion of fervour. The huge procession slowly moved on towards Raghav Pundit's house.

Just before Sri Ramakrishna's party reached its destination a significant thing happened. The women devotees in the party had brought some Prasad for the Master. All on a sudden, a rogue posing as a Vaishnava appeared, snatched a pot from the hands of one of them, and feigning divine emotion, put a little of the offering into the mouth of the Master, who was in a state of trance. At this profane touch a shudder passed through his whole body. His Samadhi broke, and he spat out the food in abhorrence and washed his mouth. He then took a grain of Prasad from another pot and had the rest distributed among the devotees. The intruder slipped away in the crowd.

Traversing the distance of half a mile in three hours, Sri Ramakrishna reached the seat of Raghav, saw the images of the gods there, and took a little rest. Gradually the crowd dispersed, and the devotees conducted the Master to his boat. They were about to start, when Nabai Chaitanya of Konnagar was seen running towards them. He had heard about the Master's arrival at the festival and had been searching for him. Finding the Master in the boat he threw himself at his feet and wept piteously praying for his blessing. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased with his zeal and devotion and in a state of trance touched him. Immediately Nabai began to dance with joy, and saluted Sri Ramakrishna again and again. The Master stroked Nabai's back, gave him advice, and restored him to his normal state. That day Nabai found a new meaning in religion, and placing the charge of his family upon his son, spent the remaining years of his life as a recluse on the bank of the Ganges, engaged in prayer and meditation. Henceforth old Nabai would fall into trances during Sankirtana, and his emotion became an inspiration to those who came in contact with him.

Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar in the evening. The devotees took leave of him and returned to Calcutta. The women intended to spend the night with the Holy Mother, as there was the festival of Snâna-yâtrâ on the following day. At night, while taking his supper, the Master remarked to one of them, "It was well that she (the Holy Mother) did not go with us, for in that great gathering everybody was watching me on account of my frequent Bhava-Samadhi. They would have made fun at our expense.[1] I admire her intelligence." Then he cited the following incident. "When the Marwari devotee Lakshmi Narayan wanted to present me with ten thousand rupees, I felt as if my head were being sawn through. I prayed, 'Mother, after such a length of time you come to tempt me again!' In order to test the trend of her (the Holy Mother's) mind, I said to her, 'Well, he wants to present me with this money. I have refused it, and he wants to give it to you. Why don't you accept it?' Her immediate reply was, 'It is impossible, for my acceptance would be the same as yours. It will have to be spent in your service, and you will be the virtual owner of it. People respect you because of your renunciation. So we cannot accept the money on any account.' I gave a sigh of relief at her words."

When this was reported to the Holy Mother she said, "From the nature of his reply when I asked to go to Panihati I understood that he did not desire it.

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[1] Because a monk's renunciation of the world includes wife and family.

Had he done so, he would have said, 'Yes, certainly.' So I changed my plan."

That night the Master had no sleep owing to a burning sensation over his entire body, probably due to the touch of promiscuous people. The next day being a special day, he had a crowd of visitors of both sexes. Among them was a woman who came to him for advice in her domestic affairs, and she marred the joy of the occasion by being too insistent. At meal-time he did not talk with her, nor did he eat freely as on other days. Later on he remarked, "In other years on this day I used to have repeated Bhava-Samadhi, and the divine ecstasy would last for two or three days. But today I had nothing of the kind. The presence of people with profane thoughts has prevented the mind from soaring upward."

The Master's participation in the Panihati festival aggravated his throat trouble. The weather had not been good, and the doctor said that on account of exposure and the frequent recurrence of Bhava-Samadhi, the ailment had taken a turn for the worse. He warned the devotees that the disease might prove obstinate if proper precautions were not taken. The devotees resolved to keep a strict watch in future. The Master, however, like a boy, shifted the whole responsibility of the trip on to Ram and some other elderly devotees, saying, "I would not have gone there had they urged me to stay here." One day, about this time, a devotee came to Dakshineswar and found the Master sitting quietly on his small bedstead, with medicine painted on his throat. He looked sullen, like a boy under strict orders not to stir out. On being asked what the trouble was, the Master said, "The pain is worse, and the doctor has told me not to talk much." "We hear," said the devotee, "that you had been to Panihati. That may be the reason for the aggravation." "Yes," the Master replied fretfully, "it was raining, and the road was muddy, yet Ram took me there and led me a pretty dance the whole day." The devotee consoled him by saying that a little care for a few days would set everything right. The Master was pleased and said, "But how can I be silent altogether? You have come from such a distance, and may I not exchange a few words with you?" The devotee said, "You need not, sir. We shall talk enough after you get well." But the Master forgot the doctor's remonstrances as well as his own pain and conversed as usual.

Another month passed, and there was no improvement. On days of the full and the new moon, the pain became more acute; it was impossible for him to eat solid food. The doctors diagnosed the disease as "Clergyman's sore throat". Proper medicines and diet were prescribed. The Master carried out the injunctions faithfully, except on two points, viz checking the divine ecstasies and giving rest to the vocal organs. As soon as he spoke of God, he lost all consciousness of the body and fell into Samadhi. Nor would he stop speaking to people who, afflicted by the world, came to him for solace. The number of such people was considerable, and was daily increasing. Ever since his meeting with Keshab in the yaer 1875, he had tried without ceasing to deliver his message to the world, and observed no regularity about food or rest. His sleep was much disturbed. He would get out of bed several times during the night, and arise at 4 o'clock, to spend the hours of the early dawn in reciting the Lord's name and in meditation. No wonder his health was broken.

Though he himself never referred to this breakdown, his consciousness of it could be easily inferred from his occasional complaints to the Divine Mother. For instance, shortly before this illness, he was heard one day as he was in an ecstatic state to say to Her, "Why dost Thou bring here these worthless people who are like milk adulterated with five times its quantity of water? My eyes are almost gone by blowing into the fire to dry up the water, and my health is shattered. This is beyond my power to do. Go and do it Thyself if Thou hast a fancy to it. Or bring only good men whom I can arouse by a few words." Another day, noticing the increasing rush of new-comers, he said in the same mood, "How is it that Thou art bringing such a crowd here? I find no time even to bathe or eat. (Pointing to his own body) This is but a perforated drum, and if you beat it day and night, how long will it last?" Still another day—as the reader knows—he prayed to Her to give some power to Vijay and others so that they might, to a certain extent, prepare the new-comers, before they came to him.

Indeed, about the latter part of the year 1884, the name of Sri Ramakrishna had become widely known to the Calcutta public, and hundreds of people were attracted to him. Notwithstanding his physical troubles he was as enthusiastic as ever in helping seekers after truth. He intuitively understood their emotional attitudes, and whenever he found one with real aspirations for God, he would be fired with a divine fervour and push him on towards the goal by precepts, or arouse his dormant spirituality by a touch. The passion for God would be redoubled and the seeker would progress easily and smoothly under the Master's guidance. This service to humanity, described as the greatest and noblest in the scriptures, he rendered disinterestedly and whole-heartedly up to the last moment of his life.

Still another month wore away. The disease proved more and more obstinate. The devotees were at a loss to know what to do, when an incident occurred which shaped their future course. A lady one day invited the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna to supper. Though she knew that the Master's condition might prevent acceptance, still she sent an invitation to him by a devotee to come, even if it were only for a few minutes, so eager was she to have him present. The messenger returned with the report that the Master could not come as there had been bleeding from the throat. Narendra, Ram, Girish, Kalipada, Devendra, Mahendra, and others who were present were alarmed at this news, and after consulting together it was agreed that they should hire a house in Calcutta and bring the Master there for treatment. Narendra Nath was much dejected during the meal. To a friend's query he replied, "Perhaps the object round which our joys are centred is going to slip away from us. I have learned from medical books and some medical friends whom I have consulted, that this kind of throat trouble ultimately develops into cancer. Today's report seems to confirm my suspicion. No remedy has yet been discovered for this fell disease."

The very next day, some of the older devotees went to Dakshineswar and proposed to the Master that he should go to Calcutta for treatment, and he agreed. A small two-storied house, commanding a view of the Ganges, was engaged in Durga Charan Mukherjee Street, Baghbazar. Three days later the Master came to Calcutta. He saw the house, but accustomed as he was to the open air of Dakshineswar, he did not like it. "Have they brought me here as they do with dying people in their last moments?" he said, and straightway walked to Balaram Bose's house. Balaram received him warmly and requested him to stay there until a suitable lodging could be found. The Master consented.

The devotees began the search for a suitable house and in the mean time invited some eminent Vaids[1] of Calcutta to diagnose the case. Gangaprasad and some other Kavirajas consulted together and diagnosed the case as "Rohini" or cancer. The devotees, getting no hope from the Vaids, thought it best to have him treated by a homoeopath.

The news of Sri Ramakrishna's arrival in Calcutta soon spread to all quarters and drew crowds of visitors to Balaram's house. In spite of the doctor's warning and the eager entreaties of his devotees, the Master very often spoke with these people and solved their problems. His unabated zeal for religious discourse made his illness seem as a pretext to come to Calcutta, in order to reach the spiritual aspirants unable to go to Dakshineswar. From morning till bedtime, with a short recess of about a couple of hours at noon, he talked and talked, answering eager questions, and illuminating by his frequent trances the hearts of innumerable devotees. He stayed there only a week, but it was a week of great spiritual enlightenment. The following incident will illustrate this. One day, the room was packed with visitors, and Girish and Kalipada were singing a song telling of Sri Chaitanya's passionate love for humanity. At the western end of the hall sat the Master facing the east, in Samadhi. His countenance wore that heavenly smile which characterised him when he was in that state. His right leg, slightly raised, was extended before him, and a devotee, with closed eyes and face and chest bathed in tears, was holding it with great care. After the song was over, Sri Ramakrishna regained partial consciousness, and bade the man before him repeat the name of Sri Krishna Chaitanya thrice.

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[1] Physicians who follow the Hindu methods of treatment.

In a few days the parlour of Gokul Chandra Bhattacharya in Shyâmpukur Street was engaged, and it was decided to place the master under the treatment of Dr. Mahendra Lâl Sarkâr.

SHYAMPUKUR

Sri Ramakrishna entered the new premises at Shyampukur in the beginning of October, 1885. The building had two large rooms and two smaller ones on the first floor. One of the bigger rooms was used as the parlour, and in the other the Master lived. Of the two smaller ones, one was used as a sleeping room by the devotees and the other by the Holy Mother when she came there. Near the exit to the roof was a small covered-in square space where the Holy Mother stayed during the day and prepared the Master's food.

According to previous arrangement, Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar was entrusted with the treatment of the Master. Long ago, during the lifetime of Mathur, he had met Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. He examined the patient carefully, prescribed for him, and asked the devotees to make a report of the patient's condition every morning. When he learned that the devotees who had brought the Master to Calcutta for treatment were defraying all expenses, he offered his services free as a labour of love.

But even the greatest of physicians could not quiet the anxious devotees. They became convinced of the necessity of securing able hands to prepare the Master's food and to nurse him by night as well as by day. Money could not possibly solve these problems. It could be done only through the combined efforts of the Holy Mother and the young devotees. But there were great difficulties in the way. In the first place, there were no women's quarters in the house. How could the Holy Mother live there? Secondly, the young devotees were mostly students; how could they give their time regularly at night, without incurring the displeasure of their guardians? Moreover, some of the devotees remembered the shyness of the Holy Mother and despaired of her coming to Shyampukur. In their extremity they laid the proposal before the Master, who only said, "Will she be able to accommodate herself here? However, explain everything to her, and see if she wants to come." News was accordingly sent to the Holy Mother at Dakshineswar.

The Holy Mother, however, despite her bashfulness, had thoroughly taken to heart the Master's salutary teaching about accommodating oneself to circumstances. So when she learned that for want of a competent person to cook, the Master's illness might take a serious turn, she threw aside all considerations of personal comfort and volunteered to come at once to Shyampukur and undertake the task. It is marvellous how she managed to live for more than two months in that house amid such uncongenial surroundings. As the house had only one bath-room, she had to get up at three o'clock in the morning to take her bath and then steal into her narrow place near the roof. There she would prepare the food and send word through Gopal Senior or Latu that it was ready, and would either take it herself to the Master, or if circumstances did not permit, send it by the devotees. She took her dinner and rest at noon in that garret, and after 11 P.M., when the whole household was asleep, she came down to her bedroom to snatch a few hours' sleep after the day's hard labour. Fortified with the expectation of the Master's recovery, she did her work silently and cheerfully, and few among even the regular visitors knew that she was there as the Master's chief nurse.

When the question of diet was settled, attention was given to the matter of night nursing. Narendra Nath took this charge upon himself and began to pass the nights at Shyampukur. Fired by his example, a few sturdy youths such as Gopal Junior (a new recruit), Kali, and Shashi lent their aid. Narendra's sacrifice for the sake of the Master, his inspiring talks and association with them made an indelible impression upon their minds, and they banished all selfishness, resolving to consecrate their lives to the noble ideal of service unto the Guru and realisation of God. So long as their guardians did not know of these resolutions, no objection was raised to their attendance on Sri Ramakrishna. But when, with the aggravation of the Master's illness, these boys devoted their entire attention to his service, neglecting their studies and not going home even for meals, the guardians became alarmed and had recourse to various means, fair or foul, to bring them back. But the boys, with the glorious object-lesson of Narendra Nath before them, stood firm as rocks. It is interesting to note that though only four or five were attracted to this labour of love at its initial stage at Shyampukur, the number of such workers was almost quadrupled towards the last.

But the devotees were still anxious. They had learned from various eminent physicians that the disease, even if there were a possibility of cure, was likely to prove obstinate. Whence would come the funds for protracted treatment? Among the householder devotees who had brought the Master to Calcutta for treatment, there was not one who had means enough, after maintaining his own family, to undertake single-handed the expenses of the Master and his attendants. It was their faith in the superhuman personality of the Master that had enabled them to shoulder this great responsibility so far. Would they have to give way before the stern reality of the world? But whenever their faith wavered, they would find in Sri Ramakrishna such unprecedented evidences of spiritual power, that their misgivings would be scattered to the winds, and their hearts filled with new strength and vigour. They realised that he whom they had accepted as the goal of their life, was not only a superman, but was the Lord Himself in the guise of man. They even thought that he had feigned illness in order to give them the opportunity to serve him. Then why this baseless apprehension, this anxiety for the stringency of funds? Sri Ramakrishna himself would provide the means.

That this was the real working of their minds was shown by their open discussion of the matter among themselves. One thought of mortgaging his homestead, another of pawning the family ornaments, for was not this what they would do in case of domestic troubles? A third would silently curtail his daily household expenses and ungrudgingly contribute the mite thus saved to the service of the Master. Inspired by such sentiments, Surendra undertook to pay the house-rent, and Balaram, Ramchandra, Mahendra, Girish, and other devotees divided among themselves the total cost of the Master's establishment at Shyampukur and Cossipore. The selfless enthusiasm of the devotees centred on a common object of adoration, bound them together indissolubly, and the Ramakrishna Brotherhood though it had its origin at Dakshineswar, owed most of its growth to the holy associations of Shyampukur and the Cossipore garden. It was natural, therefore, that some of the devotees believed that the main reason for the Master's disease was the consummation of this solidarity among the brothers.

The devotees formed themselves into three groups according to the interpretation of the reasons for Sri Ramakrishna's illness. The opinion of the first group—that it was all a play—has already been given. Girish Chandra Ghosh with his robust optimism was the leader of this class. The second group thought that the Master was but an instrument in the hands of the Divine Mother, who, to fulfil some mysterious purpose of Her own, calculated to promote the welfare of humanity, had temporarily put him in this condition, and that, perhaps, he himself was unable to fathom that mystery. The third group held that the body of Sri Ramakrishna, like all other material things, was subject to the laws of nature; so it was idle to ascribe an esoteric meaning to his illness. They would take a rational view of the matter until there was some revelation to the contrary. They would do their utmost to bring about his recovery, and through Sadhana would try to emulate the lofty ideals for which he stood. It was Narendra Nath who, as the spokesman of the young disciples of the Master, held to the last view. Though differing from one another in this matter, all the devotees were agreed in one respect, viz that by carrying the Master's instructions into practice and winning his favour through unstinted service, they would be able to achieve the highest goal in this life. This it was that kept their regard for one another intact in spite of differences of opinion at the time and during subsequent events. We shall now record some of those wonderful manifestations of the Master's spiritual power that stimulated the faith of his devotees to go on against overwhelming odds.

We have seen how Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar took up in right earnest the task of treating the Master. For the first few days he used to attend thrice a day to study the course of the disease. After the examination was over, he would spend hours with Sri Ramakrishna in various religious discourses. As a result, he soon recognised the great spirituality of the Master and considered it a privilege to be in his company. One day the Master began to thank him for his kindness, but he interrupted him saying, "Do you think that I spend so much time here for your sake alone? I have a personal motive in it. I derive great joy from your company. I never had the opportunity of association with you before—I was busy with other things. To be frank, I like you for your unflinching devotion to truth. But, alas, how often I find people professing one thing and doing another, which I abhor. Don't think that I am flattering you. I am no respecter of persons; even if my father is wrong, I tell him so to his face. I am notorious for bluntness." "Yes, I have heard that," said the Master with a smile, "but though you have been coming here for a pretty long time, I have had as yet no indication of that." The doctor smiled and said, "We must both thank our stars for that. Had anything in your conduct appeared hypocritical, it would not have passed without comment."

In the course of the ensuing conversation the doctor condemned those who put limitations upon God. Sri Ramakrishna was pleased with this remark and said, "You are quite right. I cannot bear such foolish statements." He then asked a devotee to sing a song of Ramprasad, which he explained to the doctor. The Master hastened to correct an inaccuracy of the singer saying, "No, you reverse the words. It ought to be: 'My mind sees it plainly, but the heart, alas, will not be satisfied!' The mind tries to understand God and soon realises that it is beyond its power to comprehend the Eternal Reality. But the heart refuses to be convinced. It is restless to attain Him." The doctor was charmed with the interpretation and exclaimed, "Quite right! The mind, like a vulgar fellow, despairs at the slightest difficulty, but the heart, undeterred, pushes on in the search for truth."

While listening to the song, one or two young devotees fell into trance. The doctor examined their pulse and said, "It appears that they have no outward consciousness." Sri Ramakrishna gently passed his hand over their chest, and uttering in their ears the name of God, brought them back to consciousness. Dr. Sarkar said to the Master, "It all seems to be your handiwork." The Master replied with a smile, "No, it is all due to His grace. The minds of these young men have not been scattered on wife, children, wealth, or fame. So they are easily concentrated in the name of God." The doctor incidentally remarked that it was a little learning that was dangerous, but profundity of knowledge always made one humble. To this Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Yes, secular knowledge generally makes one dogmatic. Vanity of learning is one of the bondages of man. It is through divine grace that with so much erudition you are still free from it." Dr. Sarkar said excitedly, "Why, I know almost nothing. I don't feel any humiliation in learning from others, even from these young men, and I can even touch their feet." "I also tell them," said the Master, "as long as I live, I can learn from others." Then referring to the doctor he said to the devotees, "You see his humility. That shows the real worth of the man." The doctor then took his leave for the day.

Thus by degrees Dr. Mahendra Lal became more and more attached to Sri Ramakrishna. The Master was anxious to bring him to the realisation of God. He caused some of his most brilliant disciples such as Mahendra, Girish, and Narendra, to associate with him.

As a result of this the doctor saw the performance of Girish Chandra's *Life of Buddha* on the stage, and several others of his religious plays. Delighted with Narendra Nath's conversation, he invited him one day to dinner. Shortly after, at Shyampukur, at his request Narendra sang for him. The doctor was charmed, warmly embraced the boy and blessed him heartily. He said to Sri Ramakrishna, "I am so glad that a boy like him has devoted himself to religion. He is a gem, and I am sure he will shine in any sphere of life." The Master glanced approvingly at Narendra and said, "They say it was the fiery appeal of Advaita Goswami that induced the Lord to incarnate as Sri Gauranga at Nadia. Similarly, all this that you see (meaning his own advent) is on account of him (Narendra)."

Two months passed, and the illness continued unabated. The medicine had no effect. This made the doctor anxious, and he began to lay added—sometimes exaggerated—stress on the regulation of the diet. He was now taking more than a professional interest in the case. His every word and action bespoke esteem for the Master, whose love, candour, and spirituality had captured his heart. The doctor's love now extended even to the devotees, who, he was convinced, were sincere in their devotion to their Guru. But the degree of reverence they paid to him seemed to the doctor altogether disproportionate. He was opposed to paying divine honours to any man, even if he were considered an Incarnation. One day he openly expressed himself to Sri Ramakrishna to this effect saying, "I can understand the significance of love and devotion to God. But to say that the Infinite descends on earth in the form of man creates all the trouble. It is difficult to realise how He could come as the child of

Yashoda, or Mary, or Sachi.[1] It is this that has spoilt everything!" The Master was amused and said to his devotees, "Just listen to him! It is absurd. There are, of course, foolish bigots who disturb the peace of the world by giving undue prominence to their respective ideals. But that does not alter the truth of Divine Incarnation."

There was many a passage at arms on this point between the doctor and some of the devotees—Girish and Narendra Nath, for instance—and he had to admit that there was much to be said on the other side also. Thenceforth he expressed his views cautiously. But what these arguments failed to do, the Master's great love and sweetness, and the frequent manifestations of spiritual power to which the doctor was an eye-witness, accomplished in a short time. His vision was thus gradually enlarged. We shall give here an incident which left an indelible impress upon his mind.

It was the occasion of the Durga Puja. Surendra Nath Mitra, who was observing this festival at his own house, was sad because the Master's illness prevented his coming. In the evening of the second day of the festival, many people, including Narendra Nath and Dr. Sarkar, were assembled in Sri Ramakrishna's room. Narendra was singing; every one was deeply affected. The Master went into trance repeatedly. The clock struck half past seven, and the most auspicious moment of the day—the Sandhi, as it is called—arrived. The doctor was about to take his leave, and Sri Ramakrishna stood up to bid him good-bye, when he suddenly fell into deep Samadhi. The devotees thought it to be due to the special sanctity of the hour. The doctor took his seat again to see what would happen next. About half an hour later, Sri Ramakrishna returned to normal consciousness and told his devotees what he had just experienced. He said, "I saw a luminous path open up between here and Surendra's house. Through Surendra's devotion the Mother was manifest in the image there—Her third eye was emitting a divine light. The usual series of lamps were burning before Her. Surendra was sitting in the courtyard, weeping bitterly. You had better go there. You will comfort him." Accordingly, Narendra Nath and the other devotees went to Surendra's house to find everything in accordance with the Master's vision.

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[1] Referring respectively to Sri Krishna, Christ, and Sri Chaitanya.

During this Samadhi, Dr. Sarkar and another doctor who was present, examined the Master's heart with a stethoscope. No heart-beat could be determined. Nor was there any reaction when the Master's eyeball was touched with a finger. Both had to confess that science was powerless to explain it.

Three weeks passed, but there was no change in the Master's health. In spite of this weak condition the Master's cheerfulness continued unabated.

The Kali Puja day—a favourite day with the Master—was approaching. Devendra proposed to worship the Mother in the Master's presence. The devotees were opposed to this on the ground that the excitement would be sure to aggravate Sri Ramakrishna's illness. So Devendra abandoned the idea. But on the eve of the festival, the Master said to some of the devotees, "Prepare the requisites of worship on a small scale. Tomorrow we shall have Kali Puja." This was hailed with delight. In the absence of specific directions only the principal things were procured. The Master made no further reference to the matter. At seven o'clock in the evening the devotees, of their own accord, brought the things to his room and arranged them near his bed. Some of them on a former occasion had seen him worship himself with flowers, etc., and expected him to do the same thing now. The Master paid no attention to all these preparations. Lamps were lighted and incense burnt. Still the Master remained silent. The devotees sat near him, some awaiting his orders, others meditating on the Mother. Though there were thirty or more people in the room, perfect silence reigned.

Among the devotees was Girish. He, like the rest, was at first surprised at the conduct of Sri Ramakrishna. But suddenly the idea struck him: "Sri Ramakrishna has no need to worship the Mother for his own sake. May he not worship Her out of pure love? But if that be so, why doesn't he do it? Can he be providing an opportunity for his devotees to worship the Divine Mother through Him? Undoubtedly!" He was beside himself with joy, and taking some flowers and sandal-paste offered them at Sri Ramakrishna's feet, shouting, "Glory to the Divine Mother!" A thrill passed through Sri Ramakrishna's body, and the next moment he was in deep Samadhi! Mahendra followed Girish. Rakhal came next. And afterwards all the devotees worshipped the Master with scented flowers. The body of the Master had in the meantime undergone a strange transformation. His face became luminous, and a divine smile played on it. One of his hands was raised, and the other was held in the posture of one offering boons, as is seen in the images of Kali. The Mother of the universe was evidently manifesting through him, and the devotees were enraptured. The room was filled with joyous shouts. When the Master regained consciousness, the sweets and fruits gathered for worship were placed before him. He partook of some and blessed the devotees that they might attain the heights of devotion and knowledge. They ate the holy Prasad and spent the greater part of the night in songs to the Divine Mother. They had seen the Master that evening in an altogether new light and were filled with joy. They realised that he would be ever with them, protecting them from all dangers and tribulations. Nestled in his arms, they would be safe for ever.

Though the Master's illness was daily growing more serious, people were coming to him in greater numbers to satisfy their spiritual yearnings. It was here that many a householder devotee like Harish Chandra Mustafi, and boys like Manindra Nath Gupta first met the Master. Sri Ramakrishna set himself to guide these new-comers according to their particular temperaments. Disregarding his illness he gave them practical directions on spirituality. One day, after showing the correct posture for meditation on the personal aspect of God, he tried to show the one needed for His impersonal aspect also. But in doing so he became merged in Samadhi. After a while he forcibly dragged his mind to a lower plane and said, "I couldn't show you any more. As soon as I sit in that posture the mind is acted upon by the suggestion and becomes absorbed in Samadhi. There is a rush of blood also towards the throat, which is painful. The doctor has therefore, repeatedly warned me against Samadhi." The young man who was the recipient of this instruction was sorry and said, "Sir, I didn't want to see you do all this." "True," the Master replied, "but I can't help giving you a little practical training."

A great Christian devotee named Prabhudayâl Misra, belonging to the Quaker sect, met the Master at Shyampukur (October 31st, 1885). He was an inhabitant of Northern India, aged about thirty-five and lived the life of a monk. His two brothers had died at the same moment, on the very day that was set for the marriage of one of them. This so shocked Prabhudayal that he renounced the world then and there. He used to wear an ochre loin-cloth under his English dress.

The following is part of his conversation with the Master:

Prabhudayal: "It is the Lord who shines through every creature."

Sri Ramakrishna (slowly to Narendra Junior): "The Lord is one, but He is called by a thousand names."

Prabhudayal: "Jesus is not simply the son of Mary. He is God Himself."

(Addressing the devotees) "Now he (Sri Ramakrishna) is what you see him; again at another time He is God Himself. You do not recognise him fully. I had a vision of him long ago, and now I see him physically. I saw a garden, and he was there, sitting on an elevated seat. There was another seated on the floor, but he was not so advanced."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you have any visions?"

Prabhudayal: "Even while I was at home, I used to see a light. Afterwards I saw Jesus. I have no words to describe his beauty. Compared with it the beauty of a woman is nothing!"

Sri Ramakrishna went to the verandah, whence he shortly returned saying, "I saw him (Misra) standing in a heroic posture." Then he went again into ecstasy, shook hands with Prabhudayal smiling, and said, "Your desire will be fulfilled."

Prabhudayal (with folded palms): "From that day I surrendered everything to you—my body, mind, and soul."

Sri Ramakrishna smiled and asked the devotees to entertain Prabhudayal.[1]

Meanwhile Dr. Sarkar had come. At the sight of him the Master fell into Samadhi. While returning to consciousness he said, "I am not senseless."

Doctor: "No, you are not!"

Then the Master sang a song about the intoxicating bliss of God, which moved the doctor greatly. Sri Ramakrishna again rose to an exalted mood and put his legs on Dr. Sarkar's lap. When he returned to normal he drew his legs away. Then he said to the doctor, "Really that remark of yours the other day was wonderful! Am I not resting on Her arms, and whom else shall I ask about my illness! If I have to pray at all, I must pray to Her!"

As he said this, his eyes were filled with tears. He said to the doctor, "You are very pure. Otherwise I could not have touched you." Then quoting a song—"He is a Sadhu who tastes the bliss of God. What is in sense-pleasures? Who cares for them?"—he said, "I shall become normal when I hear that song—'Get drunk, my mind, with the bliss of God'." Narendra, who was in another room, was called in to sing it.

While at Shyampukur, Sri Ramakrishna one day had a vision of his subtle body emerging from the gross sheath and moving about the room. It had a number of sores on the back. He was puzzled by the sight, but it was made clear to him that the touch of profane people had caused them. They themselves had been purified, but their sins had been visited on him. The Master told his devotees more than once at Dakshineswar, that he would cheerfully be born a million times for the sake of Northern India, aged about thirty-five and lived the life of a monk. His two brothers had died at the same moment, on the very day that was set for the marriage of one of them. This so shocked Prabhudayal that he renounced the world then and there. He used to wear an ochre loin-cloth under his English dress.

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About this attempt to shut out the strangers from the Master's presence, Girish Chandra said, "You may try, but you won't succeed, for he has been born for this purpose." As a matter of fact it was found that though it was possible to exclude utter strangers, the attendants could not keep out new-comers who were known to the devotees. Therefore a rule was laid down not to admit anybody into the Master's presence without proper introduction, and these were strictly forbidden to touch his feet. But there were notable exceptions in cases where the devotion of the new-comer overcame all restrictions.

One day an amusing incident happened. An actress of the theatre of which Girish was the manager, had once seen the Master during the representation of *Chaitanya Lila.* The Master had praised her skill and even allowed her to salute him by touching his feet. From that day she regarded him as a god and sought an opportunity to meet him again. Hearing of his illness she became impatient to see him and entreated Kalipada Ghosh to help her. Kalipada knew that this would not be allowed. So together they planned to hoodwink the attendants. One evening he brought her to the Shyampukur house in the guise of a young man in European dress, whom he introduced to the attendants of the Master as his friend. The rest was easy. When they came to Sri Ramakrishna they disclosed the whole plot to him; he enjoyed the fun and admired her cleverness. Pleased with her faith and devotion, he gave her some valuable advice on faith in God; then she took her departure after touching the Master's feet with her head. The disciples were much discomfited when they learned from the Master of the trick that had been played upon them. But in view of Sri Ramakrishna's enjoyment of the situation they had to forgo reproaching Kalipada.

While companionship with Sri Ramakrishna and whole-hearted service to him gave the devotees increased faith and devotion, they were unconsciously walking on a very dangerous road. Many of them began to set more value upon a sentimental display than upon renunciation and self-restraint. They did not understand that emotional outbursts without these were powerless in their battle with the flesh. There was some excuse for this error. In the first place, the mind naturally seeks the line of least resistance trying to make a compromise between God and the world, between renunciation and enjoyment. The majority of people overlook the contradictory nature of the two and are satisfied with a partial progress in spirituality. Accordingly, with every new-comer Sri Ramakrishna first of all took care to ascertain if he entertained this comfortable idea of religion. Where such proved to be the case, the highest ideal of renunciation would never be placed before the aspirant; only as much would be given as could be grasped. Hence instruction was individual, varying according to the grade of the aspirant. The advice to his young disciples destined for a life of Sannyasa was different from those given to his householder devotees. It was for this reason that in *general* instructions we find him saying, "The path of devotion as chalked out by Narada, consisting of the chanting of the Lord's name and so forth, is the only way in this Kali Yuga." But very few caught the significance of these words, which was that these methods would bring about in the worldly man a gradual renunciation of lower desires.

Another cause of the devotees' error seems to be their lack of comprehension of the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's life. His marvellous austerities and self-abnegations had been performed long before their advent, and they failed to see the adamantine foundations of his extraordinary manifestations of emotion. Matters came to a head when Girish Chandra Ghosh, who believed the Master to be an Incarnation of God, publicly announced his conviction. His was in every respect an exceptional case. But with the zeal of a convert he forgot that he was unique, and his invitation to everyone to accept his ideal and follow in his footsteps proved to be disastrous. With none of Girish's sincerity, there were some who went about declaring that they had given Sri Ramakrishna the "power of attorney" for themselves, and had, therefore, no need of spiritual discipline!

The views of Girish found a ready response in Ramchandra, who, as we have seen, was a Vaishnava and also believed that Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Krishna, and Sri Gauranga were identical. Not only did he now proclaim Sri Ramakrishna as the prophet of the age, but he also busied himself with tracing the identity of the Master's devotees with those of other Incarnations. And those who developed the greatest symptoms of sentimentality were in his estimation worthy of the highest place.

But the matter reached its climax when Vijay

Krishna Goswami came from Dacca to see the Master and declared that while he was meditating there in his room, Sri Ramakrishna had appeared before him in flesh and blood, and that he had actually been able to feel him. The sentimentality of the devotees was at its highest. Some half a dozen of them would fall into partial trances accompanied by contortions of the body whenever there was any exciting cause such as devotional music. Many of them practically gave up the exercise of their common sense and reasoning faculty, and waited in suspense for some miraculous manifestation of Sri Ramakrishna's divine power.

But among the Master's devotees there was one who was quick enough to foresee the baneful effect of such meaningless emotion. Narendra Nath saw the danger and set himself to stem the tide. He first addressed himself to the young men, who, he knew, would understand him best. He argued with them in this wise: "That effusion of sentiment which, while rousing a momentary feeling of devotion, fails to make a lasting impress on the mind—cannot strengthen a man to grapple with the temptations of the world—is neither deep nor of any permanent value in the domain of religion. It may produce physiological changes—making tears flow or hair stand on end; or it may partially deprive one of consciousness for the time being; but I am fully persuaded that it is the result of mere nervous excitation. If one cannot check it through the exercise of will-power, one should eat nutritious food and seek the help of a physician. Moreover, people feign a good deal. The higher and stronger the bounds of self-control, the deeper will be the feelings."

Few at first placed credence in Narendra Nath's words. But the truth percolated little by little. It was discovered that these effusions were in some cases feigned and the result of rehearsals at home. When a devotee was found going repeatedly into trances, Narendra Nath reasoned with him and advised him to practise self-control and to take nourishing food. Or, when Narendra was convinced that a man was merely simulating those states, he would ridicule him and thus try to correct his hysterical tendency. He also set before the young men positive ideals, and by means of songs and fiery discourses kindled in their hearts, the flame of devotion and renunciation. More frequently he would keep them spellbound with tales of the soul-stirring incidents of Sri Ramakrishna's Sadhana and interpreting his greatness in that light. Quoting from the *Imitation of Christ,* he would spur them on to emulate the glorious traits of the Master's character, for a servant, he said, who really loved his master must mould his life after him. This he held up before all as the true criterion of their love for Sri Ramakrishna. Again, he would remind them of the Master's teaching, "Keep the knowledge of Advaita in your pocket, and then act as you like in the world." He explained to them that Sri Ramakrishna's emotions were based on that knowledge, and it was that knowledge which they should endeavour to acquire.

While Narendra Nath was thus engaged in shaping the character of Sri Ramakrishna's children, the condition of the Master was gradually going from bad to worse. When treatment proved ineffectual, Dr. Sarkar advised a change to some garden-house outside the city. A vigorous search was made, and the spacious garden-house of Gopal Chandra Ghosh at Cossipore was hired for eighty rupees a month. In the afternoon of the 11th of December, 1885, Sri Ramakrishna was moved to the new premises which he liked very much.

COSSIPORE GARDEN AND MAHASAMADHI

With the Cossipore garden we enter upon the last chapter of Sri Ramakrishna's eventful life. It was here that the curtain fell upon his varied activities on the physical plane. On the eve of his exit from the arena of the world, the Master showed himself at his highest, and making Narendra Nath the fit instrument for the propagation of his ideas, entrusted to him the charge of his flock. The Spirit which had put on a vesture of flesh for the fulfilment of a great purpose, at its completion cast off its temporary covering and returned to its pristine state of glory. The pathos and sublimity of this closing scene, therefore, can only be felt, not described.

The Cossipore garden is a beautiful one, about five acres in extent abounding in fruit trees and flowering plants, and is situated on the right side of the road that runs north from Calcutta to Baranagore. For a little over eight months the Master stayed here and patiently bore the sufferings of the disease till his tall and robust frame was reduced to a skeleton, and he finally succumbed. But his trained mind was not affected, and he looked after the individual as well as the collective welfare of his devotees as before. With redoubled energy he set himself to complete the work that he had commenced long ago at Dakshineswar. Here he gave the greatest manifestation of his powers, and the devotees saw the fulfilment of his prophecies regarding his own end: "I shall make the whole thing public before I go", "When people in large numbers will know and whisper about (the greatness of) this body, then the Mother will take it back", "Devotees will be sifted into inner and outer circles towards the end", and so on. His predictions as to the renunciation of Narendra Nath and other young disciples were verified later, as we shall see.

The main building was a two-storied one, with three rooms below and two above. The Master occupied the hall in the centre of the upper story, a small room to its left being used by his attendants at night. To the right of the hall was an open terrace where the Master sometimes sat or walked. The hall just below his room and a smaller room to its right were used by the devotees, while a small room to the extreme left was occupied by the Holy Mother. There were some outhouses, two tanks, of which one was fairly large, and some good walks. Needless to say, both the Master and the Holy Mother breathed more freely in these new surroundings.

A few days passed in overcoming the preliminary difficulties of installation in the new place. Narendra realised that the attendants who volunteered to serve the Master must stay there—the place being too far to permit of their going home for meals—and that meant additional expense; besides, the number of attendants would have to be increased. The problem of finance might be left to the senior householder devotees; but it was he who must look to the nursing. He realised that he must spend the major portion of his time at Cossipore; for without him the other young devotees would not be able to carry on the work, in the teeth of opposition from their guardians, or to the neglect of their studies or office duties.

Narendra Nath was then preparing for the law examination. Though his studies and a law suit with his relatives demanded his constant presence in Calcutta, he decided to do his studying in the Cossipore garden during his leisure hours. He hoped to be able to provide his mother and brothers with a certain sum of money during the next few years, and then give up the world in quest of God. But destiny ordained otherwise.

Sri Ramakrishna was aware of the great difficulties which his devotees faced to ensure his treatment in Calcutta and Cossipore. It would seem that he knew the divine purpose in this phase of his life, and deeming it conducive to their welfare, he did not hesitate to accept their services. He was seen to alter their plans where they did not agree with his, sometimes openly, or without their knowledge when he feared to give offence. Just before coming to Calcutta for treatment, he said to Balaram one day, "That people should start a fund for my maintenance is not to my liking. I am not used to it. Here the case is really different. Rani Rasmani permanently settled a salary of seven rupees a month upon me as priest of the Kali temple, which I am to enjoy as long as I live here. Practically I am living on that pension. So, as long as I live outside Dakshineswar, you will please bear all my personal expenses." Again, when he heard that the Cossipore garden had been engaged at a higher rent, he wondered how his poor devotees would meet it every month. He called Surendra to him and said, "Look here, Surendra, these devotees are mostly poor clerks and have large families to maintain. So how can they subscribe the high rent of the garden? Please bear the whole of it yourself." Surendra cheerfully agreed. Similarly, in view of his increasing weakness Sri Ramakrishna knew that it would soon be impossible for him to go outside to the toilet. Seeing his anxiety Latu with great earnestness said, "Sir, I shall be your sweeper." These words, uttered with his peculiar Behari accent, made the Master as well as the devotees laugh even in that dismal situation. Thus Sri Ramakrishna tried by suggestions to minimise the difficulties of his devotees.

Gradually everything became systematic. The young disciples of the Master began to stay with him now for the most of the day and night. Narendra was their leader. When they were not occupied in the service of the Master, he would bring them together and engage them in meditation, study, discussion, or songs. Thus busied, they were always in a delightful atmosphere, and time passed unnoticed. Attracted by the pure, unselfish love of Sri Ramakrishna on the one hand, and the personality and fraternal spirit of Narendra Nath on the other, these young men formed a brotherhood more closely knit together than any family. Though the number of these sacrificing youths did not exceed twelve,[1] yet every one of them, by the consecration of his life to the service of the Guru, appeared a tower of strength.

Shortly after his arrival at Cossipore Sri Ramakrishna took a short stroll in the garden. The devotees were glad, thinking that he would be strengthened by taking such walks regularly. But it had the opposite effect, his weakness was aggravated, and he could not go out for the next few days. The doctors recommended nourishing food; and in a few days the Master felt better and stronger. This improvement continued for some days, and Dr. Sarkar was delighted to see it.

Two young attendants used to go to Calcutta every day to bring the necessary articles of food and to make a report to the doctors. The other boys divided among themselves the tasks of nursing, marketing, and other household duties. The Holy Mother had the charge of preparing the food as well as of feeding the Master. When anything special had to be made, Gopal Senior or Latu gave her the doctor's instructions. Lakshmi Devi, Sri Ramakrishna's niece, was her companion and helper. Sometimes the women devotees of the Master would come for a day or two. The monetary affairs of the household were managed by the senior devotees, who also rendered personal service by turns whenever they had leisure. Till every arrangement was complete none of the young devotees went home, except for a few hours in cases of pressing necessity, and they gave their guardians to understand that until Sri Ramakrishna's recovery they would not be able to live their old life at home. Finding them so stubborn, the guardians thought it best to give in, rather than to lose them altogether. When at the united effort of the grown-up and the young devotees the treatment and the nursing of the Master were going smoothly, Narendra had a little breathing time and thought of going home for a day or two to look after his family affairs. One night he spoke about it to his brother-disciples and went to bed. But he could not sleep. He got up, and finding Gopal Junior, Sharat, and a few others awake, he said to them, "Come, let us have a walk in the garden." In the course of the walk, Narendra said to his companions, "The Master's disease is very serious. Perhaps he intends to lay down the body. Strive your best for spiritual uplift through service unto him and prayer and meditation, while yet there is time. After his passing, there will be no end to your repentance. We are wasting time in the foolish thought that we shall pray to God after finishing this or that business at hand. We are fastening more chains of desires on us, and desires mean death. We must root them out at once."

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[1] The names of these twelve devotees are Narendra, Rakhal, Baburam, Niranjan, Yogin, Latu, Tarak, Gopal Senior, Kali, Shashi, Sharat, and Gopal Junior. Sarada on account of the persecution of his father used to come now and then and stay for a day or two. Harish stayed only for a few days, after which his brain was deranged, and he went home. Hari and Gangadhar came at intervals and practised Tapasya at home.

It was a cold starry night, and perfect stillness reigned everywhere. Narendra's introspective mind caught the contagion of the hour and felt disposed to meditate. He sat under a tree, and seeing a stack of dry hay and twigs near by, he said, "Set fire to that. At this hour the monks light their Dhuni fire. Let us do the same and burn up our desires." The fire was lighted. The young devotees, as they put the faggots into the fire, made a holocaust of their desires at the same time. The very thought filled their hearts with unexpected joy. They actually felt that their minds were being purged, and that they were coming closer to God. After two or three hours, they put out the fire and retired. Narendra went home according to previous arrangement and returned in a couple of days.

About this time, Pundit Shashadhar paid a visit to the Master in the Cossipore garden and said, "Sir, the scripture says that saints like you can cure their physical illness by means of will-power alone. If you only concentrate your mind on the affected part, with the resolve that it be cured, you will be cured. Why don't you try it, sir?" The Master replied, "You are a scholar, and still you make this thoughtless proposal! This mind has been given up to God once for all. How can I withdraw it from Him to turn it on this worthless body?" Such was his resignation to God, even in his agony!

Shashadhar was silenced. But Narendra and other devotees were not. After the departure of Shashadhar, they pressed Sri Ramakrishna to try it. "You must cure your illness," they persisted, "for our sake at least."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Do you think that I have been undergoing this suffering voluntarily? I do wish to recover. But how is that possible? It all depends upon the Mother."

Narendra: "Then please pray to Her for your recovery. She cannot but listen to you."

Sri Ramakrishna: "It is easy for you to say so, but such words I can never utter."

Narendra: "No, sir, that won't do. You must tell the Mother about it, at least for our sake."

Sri Ramakrishna: "All right, I shall try to do so if I can."

After a few hours Narendra Nath asked the Master if he had prayed, and if so, with what result.

Sri Ramakrishna: "I said to Her, 'I cannot eat anything for this pain. Please so arrange that I may eat a little.' She showed you all and said, 'Why, you are eating through so many mouths!' I was ashamed and could not utter another word."

What a total indifference to the body! What a firm grasp of the knowledge of Oneness!

Now another physician undertook the treatment of the Master. Dr. Rajendra Lal Datta, a distinguished homoeopath of Calcutta, had heard of the illness, and of his own accord proposed to try another remedy with the approval of his friend, Dr. Sarkar. The results were good temporarily, and the devotees were encouraged.

On the morning of December 23rd 1885, the Master was in a particularly happy mood. He said to Niranjan, "You are my father, I shall sit on your lap." Touching Kalipada's chest he said, "Be illumined." Two women devotees also received his blessings that morning. He touched them on the chest with his foot while he was in Samadhi. One of them wept as she said, "Oh, you are so kind!" The Master summoned

Gopal Senior also, to bless him. In the evening he said to Mahendra, "My task of teaching is almost finished—I can no longer instruct people. The whole world I see to be nothing but the Lord. I sometimes think, whom shall I teach?" In the course of the talk he asked Niranjan—who had just returned from home—how he felt towards him. Niranjan replied, "Sir, formerly I loved you, but now it is impossible to live away from you." Mahendra said, "Sir, the other day I realised what difficulties these boys surmounted to come here and take charge of you." The words stirred the Master's feelings deeply and he fell into a trance. Regaining consciousness he said, "I saw that everything was passing from the embodied to the disembodied state! I wish to reveal more, but I can't. Well, isn't that trend towards the Impersonal an indication of the coming dissolution of the body?"

Mahendra: "Perhaps so."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Even now I see the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, without names or forms, exists—like this! (He showed by a gesture). With great difficulty I curbed my feelings.

"This disease marks out the inner circle of devotees from the outer. Those who have renounced the world and are living here belong to the former class, while those who pay occasional visits and only ask about my health are of the latter class."

We now come to an event of great importance, showing the Master's wonderful love for his devotees and his extraordinary spiritual power. It was the 1st of January, 1886. Sri Ramakrishna felt much better and wished to take a walk in the garden. It was about three in the afternoon. As it was a holiday, about thirty lay disciples were present, some in the hall and others under the trees. When Sri Ramakrishna came down, those in the hall saluted him and followed him at a distance as he walked slowly towards the gate. Girish, Ram, Atul, and some others, who were chatting under a tree, came and saluted the Master. Sri Ramakrishna suddenly said to Girish, "Well Girish, what have you found in me that you proclaim me before all as an Incarnation?" Girish, not at all taken aback by the question, knelt before him with folded hands and said in a voice shaken with emotion, "What can an insignificant creature like me say about One whose glory even sages like Vyâsa and Vâlmiki could not measure?" Hearing these words, spoken with the greatest intensity, Sri Ramakrishna was deeply moved and said, "What more shall I say! I bless you all! Be illumined!" Saying this he fell into a state of semi-consciousness. The devotees heard these solemn words and became mad with joy. They forgot their resolutions to avoid touching him. Overwhelmed with emotion they moved forward to take the dust of his feet. One by one they saluted him. At this manifestation of devotion, Sri Ramakrishna's mercy over-stepped its bounds, and he touched them all, one by one, with appropriate blessings. This powerful touch revolutionised their minds. Some laughed, others wept, some sat down to meditate, while a few shouted to others who were elsewhere to come and be blessed. Narendra and a few other young devotees, who had passed the greater part of the preceding night in attendance on the Master and in devotional exercises, were asleep. Latu and Sharat, who took this opportunity to sweep the Master's room and sun his bedding, witnessed the scene from the roof. They preferred to finish their work and kept to their posts.

Gradually the Master regained his normal state and returned to his room. The devotees upon calming down realised that the Master was showering his grace upon all without distinction.

Questioned about their experiences on this occasion, some said that they had felt a sort of pleasing intoxication, others that they had clearer visions of their Chosen Ideals than before, still others that they had seen an effulgence or felt the rush of a strange current, while all confessed to having had an inexpressible bliss. Every one was convinced that it was due to the Master's grace. Only two persons did not receive the Master's blessings.[1] In this connection special mention may be made of a devotee named Hârân Chandra Dâs who received unusual favour. As he prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna, the latter in that state of trance placed his foot on his head.

The following is the account of Ramlal, the nephew of the Master: "Formerly I could see in meditation only portions of my Chosen Ideal's form. But that day, His entire form flashed before my vision, and I saw Him seated in my heart as a distinct living presence." Vaikuntha said, "After two or three devotees had been blessed, I, too, stepped forward and saluting him asked his blessing. He said, 'You have already everything.' 'Then please make me feel it,' I said. He said, 'All right,' and lightly touched my chest. That worked a strange transformation within me. I saw the blissful form of the Master in everything I saw. I was beside myself with joy and shouted to all to come and share in the blessing. That vision haunted me for days, and my work suffered in consequence. Unable to bear the tension, I had to pray to Sri Ramakrishna to lessen its intensity, after which it became intermittent."

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[1] They, too, were blessed afterwards.

It is said that after the incident Sri Ramakrishna experienced a burning sensation all over the body—due, as was alleged, to taking on the sins of the persons touched—and asked for some Ganges water to be sprinkled over him, which relieved the suffering.

Narendra at this time was burning with a tremendous hankering for realisation. We reproduce some of his experiences as recounted by him to M. at Cossipore.

Narendra: "Last Saturday (2nd January, 1886) I was meditating here. Suddenly I felt a strange sensation within my chest."

Mahendra: "The awakening of the Kundalini."

Narendra: "Probably so. I felt clearly the nerves Idâ and Pingalâ, and asked Hazra to feel my chest. Yesterday I saw Sri Ramakrishna upstairs and said, 'Everyone has been blessed with realisation. Let me, too, have something. When all have got it, shall I alone be without it?' He said, 'Just make some arrangement for your family, and you shall get all. What do you want?' I said, 'I wish to remain immersed in Samadhi for three or four days at a stretch, breaking it only for food.' He said, 'You are a fool. There is a higher state than that even. Don't you sing—Whatever is, is Thyself? Come here after making some provision for your family, and you shall get a higher state than even Samadhi.'

"This morning I went home. They began to take me to task for neglecting my studies when I should be preparing for my examination. I went to my study at my grandmother's house, to read. But as I was about to begin, I was seized with a sort of dread, as if it were a most horrible thing to study! There was such a struggle in my heart! I never wept like that in my life!

"Leaving my books and all, I came here. My shoes slipped off somewhere on the road. Dashing past a rick of straw, some of it stuck to me! I ran and ran till I reached here."

It was nine o'clock in the evening of January 4th. Niranjan, Shashi and M. sat near the Master, who was just awake after a short sleep. The disease had taken a turn for the worse, and the pain was very great. But still he talked in whispers, or by signs, about Narendra. He said "Look at the wonderful state of Narendra! There was a time when he did not believe in the personal aspect of God. Now see how he is panting for realisation!" Then he hinted that Narendra was soon to reach the goal.

That very night Narendra left for Dakshineswar with one or two brother-disciples, to meditate. Under the Master's directions he had been practising different forms of spiritual discipline, with remarkable success. Sri Ramakrishna was preparing his chief disciple for the great task which was to be his later. One day the Master expressly commissioned him to look after the young devotees, saying, "I leave them in your care. See that they practise spiritual exercises and do not return home." He was silently training them for the monastic life, and we find him one day asking Naren and the other young men if they would beg their food in the streets. They all hailed the proposal with delight and went out with begging-bowls. They cooked the various raw foods which they had received, and offered some to the Master, who partook of a grain or two of rice and said, "Well done. This food is very pure." He was overjoyed to think that it would not be long before these young men, clad in the ochre robe of the Sannyasin, would go begging their food from door to door and conferring upon humanity the highest blessings of religion. He was satisfied.

On the Shivarâtri day the young group passed the night in chanting and meditation. Narendra, whose austerities were opening up to him new sources of spiritual power, had a fancy to test that power. He asked Kali to touch him and became absorbed in meditation for some minutes. What he did in these few minutes is not known, but it had the effect of throwing Kali into a very deep meditation. Sri Ramakrishna somehow learned of it and took Narendra to task for frittering away his powers before they were accumulated as well as for his imposing his ideas on another.

Sri Ramakrishna was sinking daily; his body was worn to a skeleton, and his diet was reduced to a minimum. All this grieved the devotees. They knew now that they were going to lose the great mainstay of their life. The haemorrhage terrified them. But the Master looked as cheerful as ever. When the pain was excruciating, he would only whisper with a smile, "Let the body and its pain take care of each other, thou, my mind, be always in bliss!" He became even more solicitous for the welfare of his devotees. One night (March 14th), when he was wide awake, he whispered to Mahendra, "I am bearing all this cheerfully because otherwise you would be weeping. If you all will say that it is better that the body should go rather than suffer this torture, I am willing." Towards morning Girish arrived with Dr. Upendra and Kaviraj Navagopal. The Master was slightly better. To the devotees who sat by he said, "The disease is of the body. Quite naturally. I see that it is made of material particles." Turning to Girish he said, "I see many forms of the Lord, and this (his own form), too, is one of them!"

The next morning he felt better. It was about

8 o'clock. Narendra, Rakhal, Latu, Mahendra, Gopal Senior, and others sat there in gloom. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Do you know what I see? God has become everything! Men and animals appear to be but frameworks coated with skin, and it is He who is moving the head and limbs! As I once saw in a vision—garden, houses, roads, men, and cattle, everything made of wax—composed of the same substance!

"I see He Himself is the executioner, the victim and the sacrificial post!"

As he said this, he lost his outer senses. Regaining partial consciousness, he said, "Now I have no pain—I am perfectly at ease!"

Looking at Latu he said, "There sits Latu, leaning his head upon his hand. To me it is as if the Lord were sitting in that posture!"

As he looked at his devotees, he seemed to be melting in love. He passed his hand over the faces of Rakhal and Narendra as a mother caresses her child. A short while after he said to Mahendra, "Had this body (meaning himself) been allowed to last a little longer, many more poeple would have been spiritually awakened." He paused for a moment and resumed, "But Mother has ordained otherwise. Lest people should take advantage of my simplicity and illiteracy, and prevail upon me to bestow the rare gifts of spirituality, She will take me away. And this is an age when devotional exercises are at a sad discount."

Rakhal (tenderly): "Please ask Her to make your body last."

Sri Ramakrishna: "That depends upon Her will."

Narendra: "Your will is at one with Hers."

Sri Ramakrishna (after a little pause): "It won't do any good. How can I ask Her for anything when my will is entirely merged in Hers?"

The devotees sat silent. Sri Ramakrishna gazed at them tenderly, placed his hand on his chest, and said, "Here (i.e., within him) are two personalities. One is She, and the other is Her devotee. It is the latter who broke his arm, and, it is he again who is ill. Do you understand?"

The disciples were silent. The Master added, "Alas! To whom shall I tell all this, and who will understand me?" Then after a pause he said, "He comes with His devotees as a man—as an Incarnation. The devotees again return with Him."

Rakhal: "You must not leave us behind."

Sri Ramakrishna (smiling): "A band of minstrels appears before a house. They sing and dance, and go away as suddenly as they come—nobody knows them!"

The Master and the devotees smiled. After a short pause he began: "Pain is unavoidable so long as there is form. That the Lord takes on a form is for the sake of His devotees."

Looking affectionately at Narendra, the Master gave him some instructions about the state of a man after realisation.

Narendra: "Some get cross with me when I advocate the need of renunciation."

Sri Ramakrishna (in a whisper): "One *must* renounce. (Pointing to his limbs) Suppose one thing is placed under another. If you want to take the former, won't you have to remove the latter? Can you get at that without removing this?"

Narendra: "Quite so."

Sri Ramakrishna: "When you see everything saturated with That, can you see anything else?"

Narendra: "Is renunciation of the world imperative?"

Sri Ramakrishna: "As I said, if you see everything as saturated with That, can you see anything else—family or the like?"

Sri Ramakrishna praised Narendra's spirit of renunciation. Rakhal said, "Narendra now appreciates you thoroughly." To which the Master replied, "Yes, and many others are doing the same."

At the Master's request Narendra sang some devotional songs which drew tears from the eyes of the Master and Rakhal.

When everything failed to bring about the recovery of the Master, the Holy Mother wanted to try spiritual methods. She went to Tarakeswar to obtain the grace of the Lord Shiva for her husband's cure. She lay prostrate before the temple praying—resolved not to touch food till her prayer was answered. On the second night she was startled by a crashing noise. A great spirit of renunciation overcame her, and she thought. "What are earthly relationships! Are they not mere dreams?" She arose and returned to Cossipore. As soon as the Master saw her he asked, "Well, what is the result of your mission?" The Holy Mother told him what had happened. He seemed to have expected it.

The zeal of the young devotees, particularly of Narendra Nath, for realisation was increasing. One day his brother-disciples missed him and two others. Subsequently it was found that spurred on by the immortal example of Lord Buddha, he with Tarak and Kali had gone to Bodh-Gaya, dressed in ochre cloth, to practise austerities. It was feared that he might not return. His absence was much felt by the other disciples at Cossipore. When others wanted to do the same, the matter was reported to Sri Ramakrishna. He assured all that Narendra, convinced of the futility of searching here and there for religion, would soon come back. As a matter of fact, the party did return after a few days, having enjoyed their stay very much at the place of Buddha's Nirvana.

Kali, too, was struggling for a realisation of the highest truth. No lower phase interested him. A wave of doubt swept over his mind. When he consulted the Master about it, he was asked, "Do you believe in God?" Kali said, "No." "Do you believe in religion?" "No," replied the boy frankly, "I don't believe in the Vedas or any scriptures. I don't believe in anything spiritual." The Master took these words calmly and said, "Had you spoken like this to an ordinary Guru, he would have struck you. Look at Naren. He also passed through the same state of doubt, but he now believes in everything. He sheds tears in the name of Radha and Krishna. Your doubts, too, will be dispelled shortly, and you will believe in everything."

Great as was the devotion of every one of the attendants to Sri Ramakrishna, that of Shashi was by far the most conspicuous. It was unparalleled. Shashi was the very embodiment of service. He was convinced that the service to the Guru was the highest form of religion. He practised no other spiritual discipline. He knew no other asceticism. Regardless of personal comfort, of food, or rest, he was ever at work. His one idea was to alleviate the suffering of the Master. He would have given up his life, if he thought that would cure him. He had attained perfection through service, so of what use were other forms of discipline to him? Everyone marvelled at his indefatigable energy, his sustained power of endurance, and his boundless love for the Master.

One day Gopal Senior expressed his desire to the

Master to distribute ochre cloths and Rudraksha rosaries among Sannyasins. Pointing to his young disciples, Sri Ramakrishna answered, "You won't find better monks than these anywhere. Give your cloths and rosaries to them." Gopal placed a bundle of ochre cloths before the Master, who distributed them among his young disciples. One cloth was left, and the Master ordered it to be preserved for Girish, who was second to none in his spirit of renunciation. One evening the Master made the young boys go through a ceremony and permitted them to receive food from the houses of all irrespective of caste. Thus it was that the disciples were initiated into the monastic order by the Master himself, and the foundation of the future Ramakrishna Order was laid.

We have seen Narendra Nath's aspirations for the highest truth and his struggles to attain it. Yet, one evening, as he was meditating, it came to him quite unexpectedly. At first he felt as if a light had been placed behind his head. Then he passed beyond all ralativity and was lost in the Absolute. He had attained the Nirvikalpa Samadhi! When he regained a little consciousness of the world, he found only his head, but not his body. He cried out, "Ah, where is my body?" Hearing his voice Gopal Senior came into the room. Naren repeated the query. "Here it is, Naren," answered Gopal. When that failed to convince Narendra, Gopal was terrified and hastened to inform the Master. The latter only said, "Let him stay in that state for a while! He has teased me long enough for it!"

After a long time, Narendra came to the consciousness of the physical world and found his brother-disciples clustered about him. An ineffable peace bathed his soul. When he came to the Master, the latter said, "Now the Mother has shown you all. But this realisation of yours shall be locked up for the present, and the key will remain with me. When you will have finished doing Mother's work, this treasure will again be yours." He advised him to be careful about his health for some days and to discriminate in the choice of food.

It was the 16th of April. The Master was a little better. Girish came to see him. The Master inquired about his health and asked Latu to bring tobacco, betel, and some refreshments for him. A devotee presented the Master with some garlands of flowers, which he put on one by one. Two of these he presented to Girish. He inquired several times if the refreshments had come. When they were brought before him, he barely tasted them and with his own hands gave the rest to Girish. Girish ate them in his presence. It was summer. The Master said, "There is good water here." He was too weak to stand, but he wanted to pour water for Girish. He moved, poured some water into a glass, and took a little on his palm to feel if it was cool. It was not cool enough, but knowing that none cooler was available, he gave it to Girish.

From his bed he began to talk almost in a whisper with Girish, Mahendra, and others on various spiritual topics—Girish's faith coming out in bold colours during the conversation. When Girish went to wash his hands, the Master sent word to him that he should not eat anything more that evening. Such incidents bring out Sri Ramakrishna's great care for his devotees.

It was the 22nd of April. Hirânanda Saukirâm, a young Sindhi graduate and editor of two papers, came from Hyderabad to see the Master. An admirer of Keshab Chandra Sen, Hirananda was familiar with

Sri Ramakrishna and visited him often during his College days in Calcutta. The Master, who loved him for his purity of heart, was glad to see him.

Sri Ramakrishna asked Mahendra if he knew him. On his answering in the affirmative, the Master wished to hear them talk together. As Mahendra kept silent, the Master called for Narendra and asked him to talk to Hirananda. After much hesitation, Hirananda said, "Well, why does the devotee suffer ?"

Narendra: "The scheme of the world is devilish. I could have created a better world."

Hirananda: "Can there be pleasure without pain ?"

Narendra: "I am offering no scheme of the universe, but simply my opinion of the present scheme. But there is one way out. Our only refuge is in pantheism: I am doing everything."

Hirananda: "That's easier said than done."

Narendra began to chant Shankara's Six Stanzas on Nirvana.

Hirananda: "Very good."

Sri Ramakrishna motioned to him to reply.

Hirananda: "To look at a room from one corner is just the same as to look at it from the centre. The dualistic position of 'Lord, I am Thy servant' leads to realisation as much as the monistic one of 'I am He.' One can enter a room by one door as well as by many."

All were silent. Hirananda requested Narendra to sing something. Narendra sang Shankara's Five Stanzas on the Loin-cloth, which Sri Ramakrishna much appreciated. The Master then asked him to sing, "Whatever is, is Thyself." Commenting on one line, Hirananda said to Narendra, "Now it is 'Thou art all.' Not 'I' but 'Thou'."

Narendra: "Give me one, and I shall give you a million. You are I, and I am you. There is nothing else except me."

Narendra began to recite some stanzas from the *Ashtâvakra Samhitâ,* a treatise on Jnana.

Sri Ramakrishna (to Hirananda, pointing to Narendra): "He moves about carrying a naked sword, as it were. (To Mahendra, pointing to Hirananda) How docile! As a hooded cobra is before a charmer!"

The Master was in an introspective mood. His face was beaming, as if untouched by his terrible pain. Some devotees had brought flowers and garlands for him. He took some flowers and with them touched his head, his throat, his heart, and so on. Then he began to talk to Mahendra.

Sri Ramakrishna: "The nerve-current has begun its upward course, I don't know how long ago. The childlike mood is upon me, and I play like this with flowers. Do you know what I am seeing? The body appears like a bamboo framework covered with cloth, and it is moving. It moves because there is someone inside.

"Like a pumpkin with its pulp and seeds scooped out; there is no attachment—passions or the like—within. The interior is perfectly clean, and—"

It was so painful for him to talk, that Mahendra added, "And you are seeing the Lord within."

Sri Ramakrishna: "Both within and without. It is the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. I see that Sachchidananda has taken on this form and is permeating everything, both inside and outside.

(To Mahendra and Hirananda, after a pause) "I look upon you all as relatives. Not one of you seems to be a stranger. I see the Lord alone moving through different forms. I also find that when the mind is joined to Him, the pain is not felt. Now I see that the

Absolute is covered, as it were, with a skin, and this ulcer of the throat lies on one side of it."

After another pause he said, "Spirit and matter sometimes borrow from each other. When the body is ill, the spirit thinks it is ill."

Hirananda wanted this point explained. Mahendra said, "When boiling water scalds the hand, we say the water has scalded the hand. Really it is the heat, and not the water."

Hirananda (to the Master): "Please give your opinion on the point—why a devotee suffers."

Sri Ramakrishna: "The body only suffers. Do you follow me?"

Then the Master hinted that in his case it was due to the sins of other people whom in exalted moods he had touched and redeemed—a clear case of vicarious atonement.

May, June, and July passed, and Sri Ramakrishna's condition went from bad to worse. The devotees realised that the day of his final release from the torments of the body was at hand. They were heartbroken, but resigned themselves to the inevitable decree of Providence.

In spite of failing forces, the Master continued his spiritual work. One day he initiated Narendra with the name of Rama, which, he said, was his own Ishta-Mantra. It produced a miraculous effect. Narendra was filled with bliss and in the intoxication of it went round and round the house, uttering the name of Rama. He was in such an exalted mood that none dared approach him. After this had gone on for hours, the other disciples grew alarmed and reported it to Sri Ramakrishna, who simply said, "Let him be. He will recover in due course." But it was 4 o'clock before Narendra regained normal consciousness.

During the Master's stay at Cossipore, Nag Mahashay saw him a few times. His visits were not frequent, for he could not bear to see the unspeakable sufferings of the Master. One day Sri Ramakrishna saw him entering the room and said, "Come near. Sit close to me." He warmly embraced Nag Mahashay for some minutes. Another day finding him at his bed-side, the Master said, "Look here, Durgacharan. The doctors have failed. Can you do anything to cure me?" Nag Mahashay reflected for a minute and then resolved to transfer the Master's disease into his own body. He said in an animated voice, "Yes, sir, I know how to cure you. By your grace I will do it at once." And he approached the Master. Sri Ramakrishna divined his purpose and pushed him back saying, "Yes, I know you can do that."

Another day—very near the end of the Master's mortal term—Nag Mahashay was entering his room, when he overheard Sri Ramakrishna asking for an Amalaka fruit and a devotee replying that it could not be had, because it was out of season. Without a word Nag Mahashay left to search all the garden about Calcutta for the fruit. For two days nobody saw him. On the third day he appeared before Sri Ramakrishna with two or three Amalakas in his hand. The Master was exceedingly glad to see him. He asked the Holy Mother to cook rice and some hot curry for Durgacharan, who came from Eastern Bengal and relished highly spiced food. When it was ready, he took a little of it first, because, as he said, Durgacharan would not take it unless it was converted into Prasad. Even in the midst of great suffering the Master thought of everything.

About eight or nine days before his passing, Sri Ramakrishna asked Yogin to read to him from the

Bengali almanac the dates from the twenty-fifth Shrâvana (9th August) onwards. Yogin read until he came to the last day of the month. The Master then made a sign that he did not want to hear any more.

Four or five days after this, the Master called Narendra Nath to his side. There was nobody else in the room. He made Narendra sit before him and gazing at him fell into Samadhi. Narendra Nath felt a subtle force like an electric shock penetrating his body. Gradually he, too, lost outward consciousness. He did not remember how long he sat there. When he came to normal consciousness, he found Sri Ramakrishna weeping. On being asked why he wept, the Master said, "Today I have given you my all and have become a Fakir! Through this power you will do immense good to the world, and then only shall you go back." It was in this way that Sri Ramakrishna passed on his powers to Narendra; henceforth Ramakrishna and Narendra Nath became as one soul. What the effect of this holy confluence was is a commonplace of history now, and we need not tell of it here. Suffice it to say that Vedanta as revivified in the life of the Master found in the person of the worthy disciple an effective instrument to bring about world-wide regeneration.

A couple of days later, the idea entered Narendra's mind of testing Sri Ramakrishna's statement that he was an Incarnation. He said to himself, "If in the midst of this dreadful physical pain he can declare his Godhead, then I shall believe him." Strange to say, the moment this thought came to him, Sri Ramakrishna summoning all his energy said distinctly, "He who was Rama and Krishna, is now Ramakrishna in this body—but not in your Vedantic sense!" Narendra was stricken with shame and remorse for having doubted the Master even after so many revelations.

At last the eventful day arrived, a day of intense grief for the devotees. It was Sunday, August 15th, the last day of Shravana. The Master's suffering was at its highest. He became restless. The pulse was irregular. Atul, whose skill in feeling the pulse the Master often praised, was the first to realise the gravity of the situation. He declared the case to be hopeless and asked the attendants to be on the alert. A little before dusk, the Master felt difficulty in breathing. The devotees wept in grief. The light that illumined their hearts was, humanly speaking, about to be extinguished. They stood by the bed-side of the Master. In the evening he complained of hunger. The attendants tried to give him a little liquid food, but he could swallow very little of it. They washed his mouth and carefully laid him on the bed, stretching his legs and supporting them with pillows. Two attendants were fanning him. Suddenly the Master fell into Samadhi. The body became stiff. There was something about this Samadhi which struck Shashi as unusual, and he began to weep. Girish and Ram were sent for. After midnight Sri Ramakrishna regained consciousness and said that he was exceedingly hungry. He was helped to sit up and took a full cup of porridge without discomfort. It was many days since he had so little difficulty in eating. He said he was quite refreshed. Narendra suggested that he should go to sleep. At this the Master in a clear voice—another unusual thing—uttered thrice the name of Kali and gently lay down. Seeing the Master was comfortable, Narendra went downstairs to rest.

Suddenly, at two minutes past one, a thrill passed through the Master's body, making the hair stand on end. The eyes became fixed on the tip of the nose. The face was lit up with a smile. The Master entered into Samadhi. It was Mahasamadhi, for never more did he return to the mortal plane. Thus in the early hours of Monday, the 16th of August, 1886, Sri Ramakrishna departed from the world, leaving a host of stricken devotees and admirers. The greatest man the nineteenth century had produced went back to the eternal state from which he had come. Though it was a brilliant moonlit night, the hearts of the devotees were in dark shadow. A few minutes before, who were richer than they? But now they were the poorest beings on earth. The more they looked at the serene face of the Master, the more desolate and helpless they felt. Who would solve their doubts and difficulties? Who would stand by them in their sorrows and sufferings? Their sense of loss was overwhelming.

Girish and Ram came shortly after. The dismal news quickly spread all over Calcutta, and people thronged in the morning from all directions to have a last look at the Master's divine form. Colonel Vishwanath Upadhyaya arrived at about eight. He found the body stiff, but there was still some trace of heat. He began to rub the spine and after some time declared that all was not yet over, that it was a state of deep Samadhi. He advised the devotees to wait before doing the last honours to the body. At about noon Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar came and after examining the body said that life had passed out only half an hour before. His opinion was accepted as final, and arrangements were made for the funeral.

At five o'clock the sacred body was brought down and laid on a cot. It was dressed in ochre cloth and decorated with sandal-paste and flowers. At the instance of Dr. Sarkar a photograph of it was taken, with the devotees standing around. An hour later, the body was carried to the burning ghat at Cossipore, to the accompaniment of devotional music. Spectators wept as they saw the procession pass. The body was placed on the funeral pyre. Trailokya Nath Sanyal sang some suitable songs, and within a couple of hours everything was finished.

A calm resignation came to the devotees as they prepared to leave the cremation ground, for they all realised the Master's eternal presence within. He, their Lord, was the same in the disembodied state as in the physical life. In his own words, he had passed from one chamber to another, that was all. They put the sacred relics of the Master's body into an urn and returned to the Cossipore garden—the nest alas, of a thousand painfully sweet memories—shouting, "Victory to Bhagavan Ramakrishna !"

AFTER THE PASSING

The most important matter that came up before the devotees at the Cossipore garden was how to preserve in a fitting manner the sacred relics of Sri Ramakrishna. The majority were in favour of purchasing a plot of land on the Ganges and interring the relics there. For want of funds, that project had to be abandoned. The householder devotees decided to preserve the ashes in a garden owned by Ramchandra Datta at Kankurgachhi, near Calcutta, where the Master had once been. The young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, however, did not approve of the idea. They took the major portion of the bones and ashes and sent it to the house of Balaram Bose for regular worship, cherishing the ambition of burying it at the earliest opportunity somewhere on the bank of the Ganges. The rest of the ashes was taken over to Kankurgachhi and interred there on the Janmashtami day, in which ceremony the young disciples of the Master assisted, Shashi carrying the sacred vessel on his head. Ram instituted a regular service there also.

There were still a few days left before the expiration of the lease of the Cossipore garden. Of the young disciples of the Master, some had lived there, and others came daily from their homes. The former had already renounced the world, and it was evident that some of the latter were preparing to do the same. What were all these young men to do? The householders who had been defraying the expenses of the Master withdrew their aid, and some of them advised the youths to return home and lead the life of pious citizens. But close contact for so long with such burning renunciation and godliness made it impossible for them to return to the world. Surendra Nath Mitra said to them, "Brothers, where will you go? Let us hire a house where you will live together, and where we householders shall find a temporary refuge from our worldly cares. I used to contribute a trifle towards the expenses of the Cossipore garden. I shall gladly continue that bit of help and you can at least have a roof over your heads and lead a simple life." The young monks gratefully accepted the offer.

A house was engaged at Baranagore, the first monastery of the Sannyasin disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Gopal Junior, the young lay devotee, moved the Master's bedding and other things there from Cossipore. Tarak and Gopal Senior were the first regular inmates. Narendra, Rakhal, Shashi, Sharat, Baburam, and Niranjan used to visit the monastery every now and then. In a short time, however, they stayed there permanently. Kali, Latu, and Yogin went first to Vrindaban with the Holy Mother. The first two returned to the Math in the course of a few months, and the last in a year. They were followed by Sarada and Subodh. And last came Gangadhar, Hari, and Tulasi. All of them were real Sannyasins now, with new aspirations and new modes of life.[1] The pivot of their thoughts was Sri Ramakrishna. The holy relics of the Master were brought to the Math from Balaram's house, and a regular worship of him as the Guru, according to the injunctions laid down in the scriptures, was undertaken by the brotherhood.

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[1] Though the formal ceremony took place later, we give here the monastic names by which they afterwards came to be known. Narendra became Swami Vivekananda. Rakhal and Yogin became Swamis Brahmananda and Yogananda; Baburam and Niranjan, Premananda and Niranjanananda; Shashi and Sharat, Ramakrishnananda and Saradananda; Latu and Hari, Adbhutananda and Turiyananda; Sarada and Gopal Senior, Trigunatita and Advaitananda; Tarak and Kali, Shivananda and Abhedananda; and Gangadhar, Subodh and Tulasi, Akhandananda, Subodhananda and Nirmalananda. Some years after, the list was completed by Hariprasanna under the name of Swami Vijnanananda.

Thus the Master's dearly cherished ideal of monasticism took a concrete shape after his passing. The credit of it must go to Surendra. It was his generous heart that helped to lay the first brick of this citadel of a new order of monks in the soil of Bengal. He it was who looked after the infant monastery like a mother and guided it through a hundred adverse circumstances. Afterwards several other lay devotees joined hands with him in this labour of love.

The task of rallying together those young men who subsequent to the passing of the Master had gone back home and resumed their studies, fell naturally on Narendra Nath whom the Master himself had appointed their guardian. Though busy with his own domestic affairs, he lost no time in fulfilling the sacred trust that had been imposed upon him. He often visited these young disciples at their homes, dragged them from their studies, and injected into their drooping hearts the fiery message of renunciation. Disregarding their vacillations, he would spend hours in delineating the soul-stirring realisations of the Master. Often he would burst like a whirlwind upon them and drag them to the Baranagore Math. There he would spend with them hour after hour in discussion, music, or chant. Soon their minds changed and they realised that it was inconsistent to yearn for renunciation and at the same time to cling to the world.

Sometimes their guardians would come to induce them to return home. They would argue, implore, weep, or threaten, but all to no purpose, for the monks were inexorable. Some of the guardians laid the whole blame upon Narendra Nath. Rakhal said to his father, "Why do you take the trouble to come here? I am all right. Please bless me, and forget all about me. Let me, too, forget you." This was the typical mental attitude of all. After obtaining a glimpse of divine bliss, they abhorred the world with its fascinations. They felt that they must realise God then and there, or die in the attempt.

The Holy Mother tried to overcome her sense of irreparable loss by undertaking a vigorous course of Sadhana at Vrindaban, Calcutta, or her native village. One part of the pre-ordained purpose of her union with Sri Ramakrishna had been fulfilled, viz the setting up of an ideal for the householders of today to follow according to their respective capacities. There still remained another part to be accomplished, viz the transmission of the Master's spiritual power to thousands of devotees, and specially to women. It was for this that her valuable life was spared to humanity for many years.

The householder devotees were also seized with a tremendous hankering for realisation after separation from the Master. Nag Mahashay, in particular, became almost mad for it. He spent days at a time without food or sleep, praying, meditating, and weeping. Friendly persuasions proved futile. When the news reached the monks at Baranagore, Narendra Nath with Hari and Gangadhar went to see him in Calcutta. They found him in his hut lying under a quilt, writhing in agony for God. Narendra said, "We are your guests today." His intention was to make him eat under this plea. Nag Mahashay jumped up, cheerfully purchased food in the market—there was nothing in the hut—cooked it and entertained his guests. But he himself would not eat. At Narendra's importunities, he only struck his head with the cooking-pot, saying, "Shall I give food to this wretched body when it has not yet realised God!" Narendra, however, managed somehow to make him eat before leaving.

Mahendra, Balaram, Girish, Devendra, and others were also deeply shocked at the Master's death. They wept in solitude and occasionally visited the brothers at the new monastery. They were comforted when they saw the lamp of spirituality burning in these ardent souls as bright as in the days of Cossipore, and realised that the Master, though physically absent, was present in spirit. These young monks represented, as it were, the collective aspect of the Master—as if enfranchised from the body, he himself were manifest in multiple forms.

During the latter part of December, 1886, some young disciples of the Master at the Baranagore monastery and in Calcutta went to Antpur at the invitation of Baburam's mother. Here Narendra gathered the young aspirants and in the fervour of spiritual enthusiasm which was evoked here, the bond of fellowship among them was definitely sealed. The enthusiasm reached its height, quite unconsciously, on Christmas Eve, when before a burning log of wood Narendra and his brothers kept vigil, talking passionately of the life of Christ and the glories of renunciation. This stirred up the dormant spirit of renunciation in those who had lagged behind, and shortly after their return, the Baranagore monastery had its full complement of monks, all pledged to a life of the highest asceticism.

No chronicler can do full justice to the intense spiritual life these young monks led at Baranagore. Those were days of illumination, rapture, and ecstasy. The more they felt the absence of the Master on the physical plane, the more intense was their desire to realise him as the expression of Eternal Truth in the recesses of their hearts. The glimpses of Light which they, now and then, experienced only whetted their passion to possess it permanently. These boys literally became mad after God. No amount of privation or hardship, indifference or contumely, was allowed to stand in their way. They were dead to the external world. A blazing fire raged within their souls. Doubts and disappointments there were now and then, but these were mere passing phases in the spiritual struggle like little patches of cloud that hide the sun for a moment and then disappear.

Fired with the tales of the tremendous austerities of Sri Ramakrishna, these monks practised them to a great extent as regards food, dress, and other necessaries of life. Literally they proved that man does not live by bread alone. Their food was the simplest that could be conceived. Rice, with or without salt, and boiled Neem or Bimba leaves were the food upon which these youths, accustomed to luxurious living, subsisted. Sometimes they could not procure even these. Then they would shut the door and spend day and night in song and prayer. One piece of cloth and two pieces of loin-cloth were all that any could boast of in the way of clothing. Satisfied with such food and raiment, they practised devotional exercises either in the Math premises or in the adjoining cremation ground, where they would go at dead of night and pass hours in prayer and meditation. The curious part of it was that the more numerous the obstacles, the greater was their zeal for realisation.

How to realise God was their one thought. Character-building and realisation became the watchwords of their life. They abhorred preaching. Some even thought of ending their lives by continued meditation without food. At that time they lived and moved and had their being in the spirit of God. Narendra was their leader. He was alive to the difficulties of the religious path. So, with the utmost caution he began to mould their lives. He tried to broaden their outlook by saturating their minds with universal ideas, and making them conversant with the essentials of the different branches of human knowledge. The topics he took up for discussion were many and varied, ranging from comparative religion and philosophy to history and science. Narendra had a gigantic intellect; and his personality was overwhelming. No wonder, therefore, that his brother-disciples looked upon him with the highest veneration, considering him to be the mouthpiece of Sri Ramakrishna himself. Most of the sublime ideas which he afterwards gave to the world as the great Swami Vivekananda, were not new, except in the way in which they were expressed, to these brother monks, for they had heard them in the Baranagore days, or even earlier at Cossipore.

Shashi was like the mother of them all. His entire Sadhana consisted in faithfully conducting the worship of Sri Ramakrishna and serving his brother-disciples. "He was the main pillar of the Math," said Swami Vivekananda referring to him: "Without him life in the monastery would have been impossible. Often the monks would be lost in prayer and meditation, with no thought of food, and Shashi would wait with their meals ready, or even drag them out of their meditation." Rakhal was the 'Râjâ' of the brotherhood. He, too, was overpowered with an intense idea of Vairâgya. Often he thought of going to a solitary place, such as the banks of the sacred Nerbudda, to meditate. Kali was the most assiduous student of the Math. In addition to his spiritual practices, he would shut himself in his room and pore over his books—Vedanta, the Upanishads, or Western philosophy. The others also dived deep in the search for spiritual jewels, every one according to his taste. Not a moment was lost.

After some time even the holy atmosphere of the Baranagore Math seemed to become constricting to them ; they were anxious to go out into the wide world and live as wandering monks, depending solely on God. So, one by one they went, determined to tread the path of austerity and renunciation hallowed by the footsteps of the ancient Indian monks. But not Shashi —he chose to stay by the sacred relics of the Master.

They wandered all over the country from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, relying solely upon God. How faithful they were in their austerities ! They had to undergo the travails of a new birth to become the spiritual giants the world knew later. They had left behind their near and dear ones ; they stamped out their heart's desires, and suffered the anguish and agony that all seers and saints have had to endure. But behind this metamorphosis there was the constant and unerring hand of the Man who chiselled their characters, curbed the impetuosity of their spirit, held tight the reins that directed their course, and brought about their perfection. The immense possibilities which at the very first sight Sri Ramakrishna had detected in them, and openly prophesied for them, were materialised in the fulness of time. As a matter of fact, everyone of these young men whom the Master had made his very own, represented one or more phases of his own multiple personality. The great qualities of head and heart which have found their expression in these spiritual giants—in those who have passed away as well as in those who are still living—

give us some idea, at least, of how wonderful must have been the illustrious Prototype in whom these qualities appeared in the highest degree. When Swami Vivekananda rose to the highest pinnacle of his fame, when East and West vied with each other to honour him, this was the tribute he paid to his Master :

"If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped any one in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his. But if there have been curses falling from my lips, if there has been hatred coming out of me, it is all mine, and not his. All that has been weak has been mine, and all that has been life-giving, strengthening, pure, and holy, has been his inspiration, his words, and he himself. Yes, my friends, the world has yet to know that man."

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1775 Birth of Khudiram.
1791 Birth of Chandra Devi.
1805 Birth of Ramkumar.
1814 Khudiram settles at Kamarpukur.
1826 Birth of Rameshwar.
1835 Khudiram's visit to Gaya.
1836 Birth of Sri Ramakrishna, 18th February, about 5-15 A.M.
1843 Death of Khudiram.
1845 Sri Ramakrishna's holy thread ceremony.
1850 Ramkumar opens his *tol* in Calcutta.
1852 Sri Ramakrishna comes to Calcutta.
1853 Birth of the Holy Mother, 22nd December.
1855 Dakshineswar Kali Temple founded. Hriday at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna appointed first priest of the Vishnu temple and then of the Kali temple.
1856 Death of Ramkumar. Realisation and first God-intoxicated state of Sri Ramakrishna.
1857 Sri Ramakrishna's treatment under Gangaprasad.
1858 Haladhari, priest at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna goes to Kamarpukur.
1859 Sri Ramakrishna's marriage.
1860 Return to Dakshineswar. Mathur's vision.
1861 Death of Rani Rasmani. Meeting with the Brahmani. Tantra practice under the Brahmani. Second divine madness.
1863 Completion of the Tantra practice. Meeting

	with Pundit Padmalochan. Chandra Devi comes to live at Dakshineswar.
1864	Sri Ramakrishna's practice of the Vatsalya Bhava under Jatadhari. Practice of the Madhura Bhava. Initiation into Sannyasa by Totapuri.
1865	Akshay replaces Haladhari. Totapuri leaves Dakshineswar.
1866	Sri Ramakrishna in the Advaita plane for six months. Illness. Practice of Mohammedanism.
1867	Sri Ramakrishna at Kamarpukur. Brahmani takes leave.
1868	Pilgrimage. Meeting with Ganga Mai.
1870	Tour with Mathur. Sri Ramakrishna at the Colootollah Harisabha. Visit to Kalna and Navadwip.
1871	Death of Mathur.
1872	The Holy Mother's first visit to Dakshineswar. The Shorhashi Puja.
1873	Death of Rameshwar.
1874	The Holy Mother again at Dakshineswar.
1875	Sri Ramakrishna's first visit to Keshab Chandra Sen. Last visit to Kamarpukur.
1876	Death of Chandra Devi.
1877 1878	Intimacy with Keshab. The Holy Mother's third visit to Dakshineswar.
1879	Coming of disciples begins.
1880	Meeting with Rakhal and Narendra Nath.
1881	Dismissal of Hriday.
1882	Visit to Pundit Vidyasagar. The Holy Mother again at Dakshineswar.
1884	Death of Keshab. Meeting with Pundit Shashadhar. Gopala's Mother. The Holy Mother comes to live at Dakshineswar for the last time.

1885	Last visit to Panihati. Illness and removal to Shyampukur. Association with Dr. Sarkar.
1886	Treatment at Cossipore. Organisation of disciples. Mahasamadhi, 16th August, 1-2 A.M.

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